

Why the new version, and what's in it?

The new name, “Activity Generator” is more descriptive of what this program really does, than the former name “SwitchList Generator”. That’s because this program doesn’t merely generate lists, but it actually creates/generates new activities for Microsoft Train Simulator™. Plus our new enhancements give you so much more control, it really is a new evolution into true computer aided MSTS Activity creation.

New to Activity Generator:

- Users used to have to start by building their trains in a yard or spur. Now, you can start with a train already built (provided there is room on the track where the activity starts).
- Cars to be set out later in the activity had to be picked up from “Yard Tracks” that the Activity Template Designer selected. Because of that you couldn’t do setouts to any of those yard tracks, wasting a lot of tracks which might otherwise be worked. NOW you can select any tracks as “Source Tracks” from which your setouts down the line will come – or they can simply come from your original starting consist (train) if you don’t want to do any switching at the beginning.
- Users can build better locomotive consists for the trains they’ll operate with the ability to include non-driveable locomotives in all but the lead unit position. So you can use “trailing units”, AI locos, etc.
- Users can select a car to add at the end of the consist Activity Generator creates, so a caboose or “FRED”, for example, can be added at the end.
- You can change the activity start time (and all associated AI traffic is also adjusted accordingly). So you can run activities at night, midday – any time you like.
- You can generate simpler workorders or workorders more suited to unit commodity shipping like coal and grain, by a new feature that will cause the program to call for pickup of all the cars on a track (up to the maximum limits you set of course) rather than just some of them.

New Features for Activity Template Designers:

- Activity Generator will calculate spur/siding lengths based on the tdb file for you, so you needn’t estimate how many cars will fit on a given siding/spur.
- A new “Diagnostic Mode” check box creates a file that shows step by step how Activity Generator is processing your template so you can uncover problems and fine tune your template.

Other Enhancements (many were released with SwitchList Generator version 2):

One of my users emailed me and said that there were so many railcars placed in the Canton-Suddenly-Thompson world that it was eating up resources, not only costing in frame rate but actually causing some SOUNDS to be missing! I've also seen signals fail to light up due to too many locomotives with lights sitting around in the world, as AI trains or loose consists.

So I had to rethink the design of Switchlist Generator.

The original version (any version before version 2) relies on having all the right cars that you might need to pick up, already sitting in just about every spur, so they would be there if SwitchList Generator called for a pickup in that siding. This worked for most routes that had a lot of mainline and maybe 10 or 20 spurs. But some of the routes to come out recently, such as Rich Garber's Canton-Suddenly-Thompson-Grove City extension just recently released, the Seaboard Air Line Florida Division route which I helped put together, NEC 4.0, and others, required more railcars than MSTs could reliably handle.

So when I rewrote the program and created Activity Generator, I designed it to require only one "marker" car in each spur in the Activity Creation Template (to tell the program what kind of car goes there and where the first car should be placed in the spur). And even THAT single car doesn't necessarily appear in the final, generated activity that you create when you press the "Generate Activity" button. This also meant I could afford to include more of a route's spurs in the Activity Creation Templates (since they won't all get placed in the final activity the user generates).

Now, Activity Generator PLACES cars in the spurs as needed, and fills the tracks you selected to build your train from, with cars to be picked up and then set out on those spurs. There is also a new "fill world" function, so you can fill up every siding and spur (up to a safe maximum that MSTs can handle), for the look of a busy railroad (but longer load time and slower frame rates), or fill only the spurs where you'll be doing work, or pick a moderate amount of filling (the default). The choice is now yours.

What this means for Template Creators: it's MUCH easier to create templates! No more typing in the consist number or placing long strings of cars in spurs. Just plop one car on each spur (of the proper kind), add a "Pick Up Cars" event, and that's it.

What this means for end users creating activities with the program: You will see much more variety in the rolling stock placed in the "world", and can control how much there is, to give you the balance between realism and frame rate that you're looking for.

Plus there are some other cool features, such as the ability to immediately convert all the switches in any route to manual (instead of dispatcher controlled), and to convert all signals to "permissive" (so if you get stuck behind a red signal and the dispatcher won't

grant you permission to pass, you can actually save, exit MSTS, press the button on Activity Generator to make the signals permissive, reload, and voila -- you will now be able to pass the signal at restricted speed! Think of the possibilities! Same thing if you come up against a switch you can't throw: just save, exit, press the "Convert Switches to Manual" button, reload the saved activity, and you should be able to throw the switch. Please let me know if you discover routes for which this doesn't work, and which switches won't throw.

If you already have SwitchList Generator, the Activity Generator upgrade, like all our upgrades, is free. You need to remember and use your original password to unzip the file once you download it. If you've forgotten your password you can send me your PayPal receipt or other proof of purchase and I'll email you the password. Please allow me 48 hours to respond though.

We hope you enjoy this next step in the evolution of MSTS replayability and rapid activity creation!

--Steve Davis

SteveDavis@skylinecomputing.com

www.skylinecomputing.com