

The

November 2017

POTOMAC FLYER

SPECIAL EDITION

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The Potomac Division, Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association includes the District of Columbia; Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St Mary's Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, and Rappahannock Counties in Virginia, as well as all area independent cities.

Future Activities of the Potomac Division

by The Potomac Division Board of Directors

The Potomac Division is experiencing decreased participation in its programs. The Board of Directors conducted a survey that provided interesting results that are insufficient to plan future programs. Future programming will be discussed at the Membership Meeting on March 24th.

Last May, the Board of Directors sent out a survey to all of the Division members asking for input on a number of questions related to how the Board could possibly improve the model railroading services and programs that the Division currently provides.

The purpose of this special edition of “The Potomac Flyer” is to report on the results of the survey, and to identify to you some issues that are consistent with some of the insights we got from the survey results.

The report of the survey results is provided at the back of this issue. We want to thank all of those members that took the time to fill out the survey and provided their thoughts and ideas.

The Potomac Flyer

From the survey results, almost all of the members gave “The Potomac Flyer” high marks. While the high quality of the content of “The Potomac Flyer” is the result of the members who regularly contribute to the newsletter, The overall quality of the newsletter is the result of one individual, Marshall Abrams, the editor. When the previous editor of “The Potomac Flyer” stepped down, Marshall was already working as a Potomac Division Board member. Nevertheless, Marshall volunteered to temporarily be the editor of “The Potomac Flyer” until a permanent editor could be found.

Again we have made repeated requests in “The Potomac Flyer” for volunteers to step up and help Marshall with the editing of the newsletter. As with the layout tours, we have gotten no volunteers.

Publishing a quarterly newsletter takes a considerable amount of time and effort. Considering that Marshall, as a Board member, is also carrying out Board duties, his time is being stretched to the limit.

Operations Initiative

A while ago, we started the Operations Initiative. The purpose was three-fold:

- 1.) For members who do not have layouts, it was an opportunity for them to run trains on an operational layout.
- 2.) For members working towards their Master Model Railroader (MMR) certificate and were not members of any organized operations group, this would provide an opportunity for them to log the operations time required for the certificate.
- 3.) For members that have never had experience in operations, this would provide them an opportunity to learn about the various aspects of operations.

There has been a small handful of members who have volunteered to host operating sessions over the past couple of years. However, the number of members who are signing up for these sessions is dwindling. We have had one case where we canceled the session due to lack of participation. If participation in this initiative continues to drop, it will likely be cancelled.

Survey Results

We received 58 responses, which was a participation rate of 23%.

From the survey results, there appeared to be one, main overriding theme:

Most of the suggestions were related to expanding the programs that the Division currently offers. However, to provide the expanded programs that have been suggested requires a much higher level of involvement by the members. As an example, we had several suggestions that we offer more hands-on clinics. However, we need members with unique skills to step up and volunteer to offer hands-on clinics.

Other suggestions focused on the need for a larger venue for events (e.g., the Minicon). We have continually been looking for a larger venue. However, the market demand for meeting space is very high in the Washington metropolitan area, and every venue that we can find that meets our needs is well over \$1,000 for a single day, which is well beyond our budget. We have also repeatedly asked our members to let us know if they are aware of any venues that are larger than the one we currently use for the Minicons, and are affordable (i.e., less than \$1,000 a day). So far, we have had no suggestions.

Conclusion

Based on the above, the Board feels that the Division is at a crossroads. The fact that only 23% of the Division responded to the survey seems to be indicative of a general lack of interest in participating. The fact is, there are only five Board members, and these five board members cannot do everything. Unless we get more members stepping up and helping to carry out the programs that everyone seems to want, these programs will not only remain stagnant, but will likely have to be discontinued.

Next Steps

The Division will hold its next annual Business Meeting on March 24th at the Hampton Inn in Manassas, Virginia. The meeting will be from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. The purpose of the meeting will be:

- a.) Election of two Board members
- b.) Vote on revision to the Bylaws
- c.) Speaker or special clinic
- d.) Discussion with membership about the future of the Division

Please plan to attend and be prepared to discuss the issues as outlined in this edition of “The Potomac Flyer.”

PD Survey Results and Analysis

Overview

Last May, the Potomac Division (PD) Board sent out a survey to all of the PD members soliciting input on what activities members were interested in, and to see if there were any changes that we could make to the current scope of activities that the PD offers to address comments received. We received responses from 58 members, which is a 23% participation rate.

We received many thoughtful and insightful comments and suggestions, and we are truly appreciative of the time and effort many of you took to provide us with your ideas. The main difficulties that we had in evaluating the comments were that first, many comments were unique in that—we did not receive many comments of a similar nature. Thus, we could not determine if a suggestion to make a change in a program would have the support of other members. Second, many of the suggestions simply could not be implemented unless there was more participation by PD members. Third, some suggestions unfortunately cannot be implemented because of financial constraints.

Survey Results

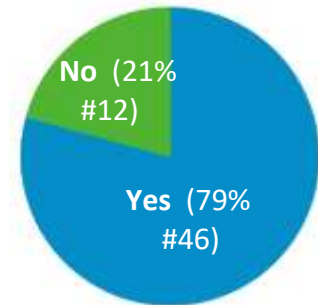
The survey universe is composed of the total PD membership of 250 persons. Fifty eight members responded, a 23% participation rate.

Conventions

Question # 1: Do you attend Potomac Division Mini-conventions?

Member comments & suggestions/response:

- Suggestion: increase advertising in order to achieve higher attendance.
- Response: Continuing efforts in marketing and advertising the Minicon including placing flyers at hobby shops, other conventions, and shows are employed. Using paid advertising in media outlets (such as national model railroading magazines) is cost prohibitive. However, we do advertise in model railroading magazines that offer free announcements. Members could help through word of mouth efforts or communicating with their memberships at churches, scouts, veterans and other groups or other institutions. This also applies to member outreach efforts in order to expand membership. If any members have any specific suggestions of other cost-effective venues, please contact any Board member.
- Suggestion: increase display room models and AP judging.
- **Response: While to Board can't force members to bring more models for display, this is a good opportunity for increased member engagement. We appreciate and encourage members bringing in more models to put on display and for judging. There is ample room for displays.**
- Suggestion: reduce concurrent clinic scheduling so members can attend more clinics
- Response: Because the Minicon is only held on one day, there is a limited, fixed amount of time available for clinics. A main goal of scheduling clinics is to provide a variety of clinic topics so members have more of a choice on what is of most interest to them. Eliminating concurrent



clinics would only result in reducing the total number of clinics we could offer in the span of one day. All clinics are posted on our web site and available immediately following the Minicon.

- Suggestion: increase clinic handouts.
- Response: In an effort to support the ecology and to reduce costs, we ask clinicians to provide their presentations electronically and we post them on our web pages.

- Suggestion: Presenting an Arduino programming clinic was suggested.
- Response: We would like to include training in new Arduino technology. However, we are unaware of any members who are knowledgeable on this topic that we can call upon to prepare and present a clinic. If any members are familiar with this topic or who know of an experienced person(s), please-contact us with the necessary information in order for the Board to pursue providing this clinic. We have doubts that there is sufficient interest in Arduino technology. The Chesapeake Division held an Arduino clinic that was advertised to PD, but no one from PD attended.

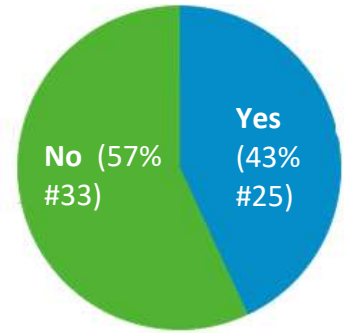
- Suggestion: use a larger venue for the Minicon.
- Response: The Board completely agrees that a larger venue for the Minicons would be desirable. For the past several years, we have been searching for alternate venues. However, the costs of renting other facilities have proven to be prohibitively high. If any members know of available locations that are of sufficient size, and cost under a maximum of about \$1,000/day, please contact Tom Brodrick on the Board of Directors.
- Suggestion: Offer a wider variety of lunch choices.
- Response: We understand that offering-a limited selection of lunch foods (e.g., pizza, Subway sandwiches) may not provide a diversity of healthy choices preferred by some members. With only approximately 60-70 persons attending the Minicon, offering a wider variety of food choices is financially and logistically not practical. Buying an assortment of different lunch items without knowing how many people want each type of lunch item would likely leave us with excess, unsold food. We would suggest that members that do not want to purchase a lunch at the Minicon could bring a bag lunch and store it in a kitchen refrigerator until lunchtime. Alternate suggestions are always welcome.

- Suggestion: change clinic presentations to hands-on clinics.
- Response: The Board agrees that more hands-on clinics would be desirable. We have been unable to find clinicians willing to offer hands-on clinics. Hands-on clinics require members to bring their tools, equipment, paints, models, etc. to the clinic room. Hands-on clinics also require more time than a conventional clinic, and often require more room, which results in logistics issues regarding scheduling and location. If members know of clinicians willing to offer hands-on clinics, please let us know and we will pursue the possibility.

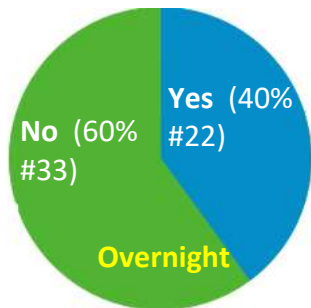
- Suggestion: eliminate the afternoon clinics in lieu of layout tours.

- Response: We believe the great majority of members attend the Minicon to avail themselves of the clinics and training involved. Layout tours are offered separately. If this assessment is incorrect, we should make this a topic of discussion at future meetings.

Question #2: Do you attend MER conventions?

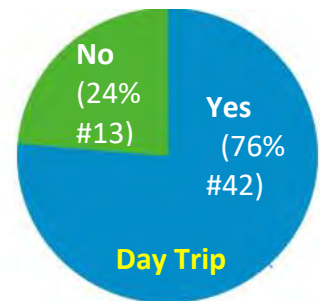


- Suggestion: eliminate the evening banquet.
- Response: The decision whether or not to have a banquet is made by the division hosting the MER convention. Thus, we can only respond regarding MER conventions that the PD hosts. Over the years, our observation has been that the banquet has been popular among members, spouses and guests, and serves as a great way for all of the attendees to meet and socialize with fellow model railroaders from other divisions. Convention attendees are not required to attend the banquet and can eat on their own at a nearby restaurant. Members who want to attend the after-dinner activities – such as the awards, after-dinner speaker, or announcements – are welcome to come into the banquet room after dinner.
- Suggestion: move the location.
- Response: Every year the MER convention is hosted by a different division within the Region. The PD hosts a regional convention usually every 5 years. The location of the MER conventions has been moved to a different location for the past two conventions hosted by the PD. In 2018 it will be at a new location. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area, site affordability is becoming the principal determinant on where the convention will be held.
- Suggestion: Include make-and-take clinics. As with hands-on clinics, logistics is an impediment. These types of clinics may be easier to offer during a Regional convention. A key issue remains the availability of clinicians. We appreciate members input on identifying potential clinicians.



Question #3: Potomac Division excursions.

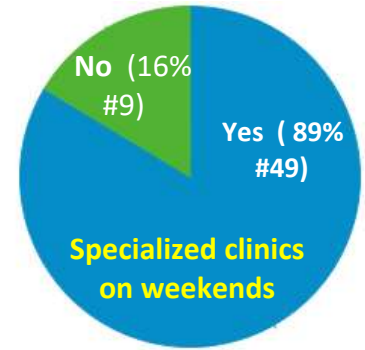
There was little member interest in overnight excursions. However, one day excursions were preferred to include behind the scenes tours and/or to integrate them as part of a regional meeting. The logistics, costs and timing of the event are key factors. We continue to try to provide these opportunities and are open to member suggestions on



locations in order to ascertain potential site visits in the future. We note that at the upcoming 2018 MER convention that the PD is hosting, there are a number of one-day excursions being planned.

Question #4: Specialized clinics/tours

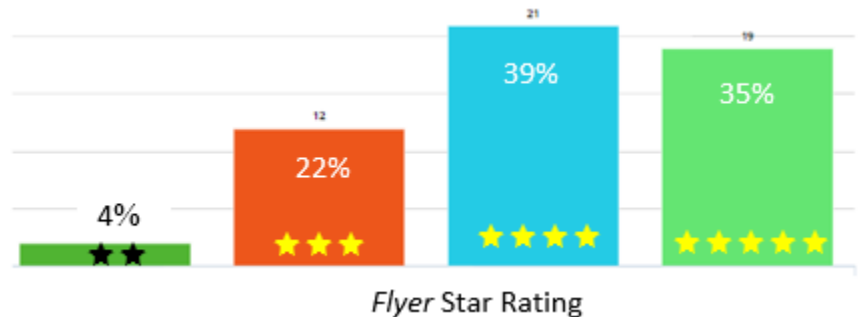
- Suggestion: offer quarterly layout tours.
- Response: We are in the process of looking into conducting layout tours on a quarterly basis, instead of the current monthly basis.
- Suggestion: change layout tours from Saturday to Sunday.
- Response: Years ago, layout tours were conducted on Sundays. A member survey showed that a majority of members preferred Saturdays, so we changed. We are unaware that this preference has changed.
- Suggestion: A "quilting bee" type of event. As we pointed out in response to similar comments about hands-on clinics, we need members to identify clinicians who are willing to lead such an event, and we need to identify venues where such an event could be held that are not prohibitively expensive. We encourage members to help us identify these.



Question 5: Potomac Division *Flyer*



There is widespread support for the *Flyer*. Ninety-six percent receive the *Flyer*, with 74% giving it 4 to 5 stars ratings (see chart on next page). Ninety-one percent (91%) feel it is interesting, easy to access, and to read.



- Suggestions include increasing more modeling articles and changing from quarterly to monthly publication.
- Response 1: Because the *Flyer* is published electronically, there are no additional costs associated with adding additional articles and increasing its length. However, in order to provide more modeling articles, we need members to submit more modeling articles for publication.
- Response 2: Regarding increasing the publication frequency from quarterly to monthly, we are currently constrained by manpower. One person is carrying the load as editor/publisher of *The Flyer*. We have solicited several times for members to volunteer to help with the publishing duties, but so far, we have had no volunteers. In addition, even if we did have volunteers, going from a quarterly to a monthly publication would result in eight additional issues a year, which means we would either need a threefold increase in the number of articles submitted for publication, or else the size of each issue would be substantially smaller than it currently is. At this time, going to a monthly publication is not practical or feasible.

- Suggestion: Have a dedicated site with links so that it is not sent in email format
- Response: *The Flyer* is currently not sent by e-mail. Members just receive an e-mail notifying them that the latest issue of *The Flyer* is available, and it includes a link so members can easily access it on their computer. Moreover, the current and past issues of *The Flyer* are all available on the PD website. The version available to the public on the web site does not include the location of home layout tours in order to protect the privacy of the hosts.

- Comment: The background watermark makes the articles hard to read.
- Response: This comment pertains to our webpage production, not *The Flyer*. We will work to ensure our web pages are more easily read by all members.

- Suggestion: publish more articles on skill development and less on recruitment and retention.
- Response: We were not sure what the basis for this comment was. We researched previous issues and found few retention and recruitment articles.

Questions #6 and 7: What can the PD do for you – events, clinics of interest, hobby interests such as operations, scenicking etc.

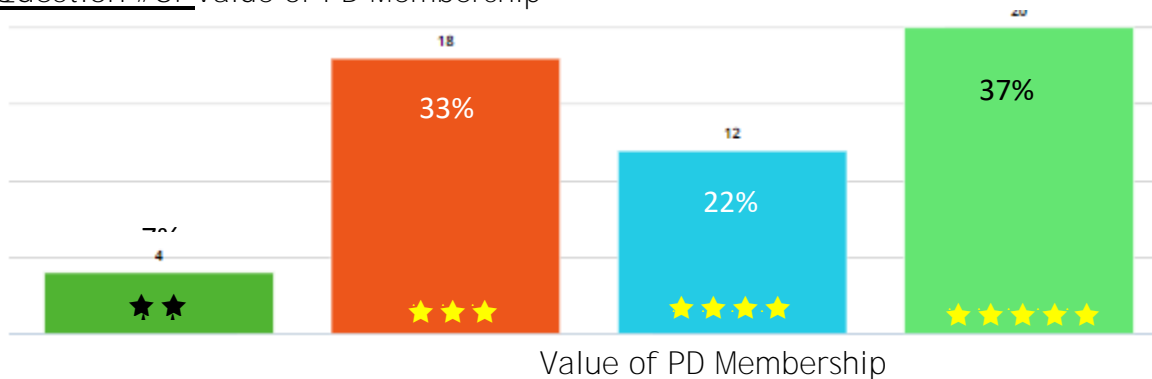
Member comments & suggestions/responses.

A member suggested eliminating the Minicon in lieu of morning clinics and afternoon layout tours. Other comments indicate that members prefer the Minicon. This can be topic of future discussion and another poll if necessary. Currently we are not aware of a majority of members preferring to change the current Minicon format.

Other suggestions included the need to access more modelers willing to share information. We are constantly striving to do so and appreciate member assistance. Please note that on the PD web page we offer a helper service, in which members with specialized model railroading skills can potentially be matched up to help modelers looking for assistance in that specialized area.

Members mentioned a listing of needed training in all aspects of the hobby and to encourage more family friendly events. We are interested in providing this needed service and continue to seek qualified trainers for all future events. Again, see the response above and note that we offer a helper service on the web page.

Question #8: Value of PD Membership



Question #9: Venue for 2018 Membership Meeting

Results on Member's Decision on 2018 membership meeting:

St Matthews Church 37%
At 2018 MER convention 19%
At Fairfax County Library. 8%

We are currently looking into finding a venue for a Spring Division membership meeting.

Conclusion

We thank all of the respondents and hope your suggestions and comments leads us to increased member engagement and support by all members in order to improve the Potomac Division. If you have additional or new comments or suggestions, please feel free to provide them to any of the Board members:

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