

The Post Detroit NMRA Convention Survey

A Report

Prepared by the 2009 Host Committee

On August 6, 2007, one full week following the close of the Detroit convention an e-mail message was sent to all 1398 NMRA Detroit registrants and persons who thought they might attend who provided an e-mail address to the convention registrar. Only 20 addresses were undeliverable. This e-mail invited recipients to visit a web survey site and provide their views in response to 36 questions regarding the convention just attended.¹ 375 persons responded before August 13, 2007², when the survey was closed.³, 29%, an astonishingly high response rate for a survey.

Note, only persons with e-mails and who registered for Detroit were polled, some cancelled their registration and they responded in the survey saying they had not attended. We cannot and do not try to infer what members without e-mail or the members not polled believe regarding an NMRA convention. That question we leave to the Board of Director's committee charged with that responsibility.

As the primary responsibilities of a local host committee are publicity, tours, layouts and clinics of local flavor we were interested in understanding what members want in these categories, these therefore were the areas queried. Inquiries by HN2009 over the past year to prior host committees and the national convention committee indicated that no quantitative analytical work existed. Written reports of what worked and "lessons learned" were helpful but difficult to utilize as guides for planning future convention content or otherwise understanding what attracts and stimulates attendance. We in HN 2009 contacted the host committees for Detroit, Anaheim, Milwaukee and Sacramento to see if they wished to support the survey concept, they did and joined in signing the e-mail. The National Convention Committee also endorsed the survey concept.

The following is, to the best of our ability, an analysis of what the responses to the questions tell us about attendee desires.

¹ The e-mail read:

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

The link in this email is a link to a survey with regard to the recent National Convention. While the survey may seem long, the National Convention and Anaheim, Hartford, Milwaukee, and Sacramento host committees are looking for your input, so please complete and submit your responses and comments as soon as possible. This information will be used to improve our National Conventions in years to come....we are listening – this is your chance for you to let us know!

The Committees thank you!"

² The link to the raw accumulated survey data is:

https://www.napsannualconference.com/NapsSurvey/wsb.dll/2/detroit_nmra_2007.htm

Then enter the pass word: hn2009.go

³ Responses had declined to one per day.

WHO ATTENDED and WHY – question 1

18% of the respondents were first time attendees at a national convention.

The recurring reason: “it was near by.”

In point of fact 272 of the attendees were from Michigan,⁴ 108 from Ohio, and 51 from Ontario, Canada. Thus, 431 attendees approximately 31% if we consider the persons canvassed by the survey, live within relatively easy driving distance of the convention site.

By way of comparison, for Philadelphia 205 attendees were from Pennsylvania, 151 from New Jersey and 94 from New York constituting 445 persons (33%, one third of the attendees). Only 65 persons from Pennsylvania, 35 from New Jersey, and 36 from New York attended Detroit. Attendees from all other states or Provinces are remarkably consistent for the 2006 and 2007 conventions. This underscores the need for a very exciting program to draw from areas distant from the convention site.

ACTIVITIES PARTICIPATED IN

Several GLE 2007 survey questions asked respondents to indicate whether or not they had attended or participated in clinics, general interest tours, layout tours, and the train show. The following table reflects the percentage of survey respondents who indicated they had participated in each GLE 2007 convention activity:

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Clinics | 82% |
| General Interest Tours | 70% |
| Layout Tours | 67% |
| Train Show | 93% |

Clinics clearly were a major factor in attendance. While **82** per cent of the GLE 2007 survey respondents indicated they had attended clinics, **75** per cent reported that they had **not** been able to attend all the clinics they had wanted to attend. Asked to indicate why not, they reported conflicts with other clinics, and with other convention activities or commitments.

⁴ All geographic attendee data were taken from the registrar's data base, provided by John Schindler.

CLINICS – questions 4 through 13

The GLE 2007 convention timetable listed clinics by category – 29 in all. The survey asked respondents to indicate each category in which they had attended a GLE 2007 clinic. The following table identifies the five categories that were checked by the **most** and the **fewest** survey respondents.

| Most Attended | Fewest Attended |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| DCC | Benchwork & Track |
| Scenery | Logging |
| Operations, Dispatching | Interurban & Trolley |
| Electronics, Signaling, Detection | Achievement Program |
| Layout Design | Garden Railroading |

Respondents also were asked to list the clinic topic(s) they would be **most** interested and **least** interested in seeing presented at future conventions. In total, **270** respondents listed clinic topics they would be most interested in; and, **190** listed clinic topics that they would be least interested in, at future conventions.

Clinic topics listed by those responding to each question (topics most, and least, interested in) generally reflected the clinic categories that most and the fewest respondents indicated they actually had attended at GLE 2007. Many survey respondents listed multiple specific topics of interest. For DCC, the most often cited category, the scope and specificity of desired clinics was extensive:

- “Pros and cons of various DCC systems”
- “How to select DCC systems”
- “How to get the maximum out of specific DCC systems”
- “How to manage with both DC and DCC”
- “DCC with sound”
- “DCC and operations”
- “DCC simple applications”
- “DCC control of accessory equipment”
- “Simple techniques for integrating DCC and signaling”
- “DCC programming hands on”
- “Using DCC macros and accessories”
- “DCC troubleshooting”
- “More step by step DCC troubleshooting”
- “DCC – computer related”
- “Advanced DCC applications like JMRI”
- “DCC updates”
- “Latest DCC”

CLINIC BOOK

The survey asked: “Would you have purchased a GLE 2007 clinic book (containing clinic presentation material) if one had been available?” The following table shows the percentage of respondents who indicated whether or not they would have purchased a clinic book:

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| Yes | 35% |
| Maybe | 29% |
| Probably Not | 22% |
| No | 14% |

Overall the break out of the interest of our attendees tells us that they first want the basics and then want to know what is the state of the art for making their layout run more realistically. Clearly, the mix of basic and more advanced clinics must be maintained.

The survey also asked respondents to “Please share any additional comments/suggestions you may have about clinic presentations.” And, **150** survey respondents chose to provide that additional input. Their comments and suggestions regarding clinic presentations may be summarized as:

- Screen potential clinicians for knowledge of topic, preparation and presentation skills
- Schedule clinics more than once, on other days, and split between day and evening
- Announce clinic schedule well in advance, preferably at same time as tour schedule
- Require well-thought out handouts, to be available in ample quantity at clinic start
- Provide video projection for demonstration clinics, to improve visibility in room
- Start clinics promptly, and keep presenters to time limit.
- Remind attendees to silence cell phones, and themselves, as courtesy to others
- Have presenters introduce themselves, or be introduced by someone
- Make clinic book available; and better yet, CD or DVD containing clinic material

LAYOUT TOURS – questions 14 and 15

67% of respondents went on layout tours.

Of the 248 respondents who toured layouts - 79 went on one tour, 68 two tours, 44 three tours, 18 four tours, 13 five tours, and ten 6 tours. The remaining 10 respondents went on 7 or more tours. Some folks commented that this is the only reason to attend.

TRAIN SHOW – question 16
344 indicated they attended.

An open question here, with one third of our convention attendees being local and the overall audience of the show being local (the public) should not more local vendors be present at the show? Would this assist in promoting NMRA membership?

GENERAL INTEREST TOURS - questions 17 and 18

70% of respondents participated

Detroit River Cruise and The Henry Ford gained the highest participation.

PROTOTYPE TOURS – questions 19 through 25

The data from the respondents indicates, that it is vital to provide these Prototype Tours. Over 57 % of those responding indicated that the trips were one reason for attending.

There were 14 prototype tours offered during the Detroit Convention. The primary reason given for going on a tour was to obtain modeling ideas (40%). The most popular tour was the Great Lakes Express Steam Excursion. The top 5 tours drew 47% of those used. Of these, three were railroad customers and the other two were carrier operations.

Overall, attendees appear to be pleased with the Prototype tours. General satisfaction was indicated with 74 % stating so. Over 80 % stated that the tour guide provided information and insights for the trip.

Respondents also provided a number of suggestions for the Anaheim Meeting.⁵

⁵ See the raw survey responses to question 25.

REGARDING PLANS TO ATTEND ANAHEIM AND HARTFORD – Question 26 and 27

These two survey questions asked respondents to indicate whether they were thinking about or planning, at the present time, to attend the Anaheim 2008 and the Hartford 2009 NMRA national conventions. The following table summarizes the percentage of survey respondents who indicated each of the three choices for the next two NMRA national conventions:

| | Anaheim | Hartford |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Plan To Attend | 35% | 45% |
| May Attend | 23% | 39% |
| Do Not Plan To Attend | 42% | 16% |

This appears to reflect the regional attendance pattern described in the introduction to this report.

GETTING TO THE CONVENTION – question 28

Not surprisingly 62% drove, 29% flew, 6% arrived by train. This clearly underscores the recurring request for inexpensive local parking and the need to explore options to better serve attendees in this area.

LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP – question 29

62% of respondents have been members for 10 or more years
18% 5-9 years, 10% 2-4 years, while 9% have been with the NMRA for only one year. Thus, 80% of respondents are long time members and when coupled with the responses to the question regarding the number of conventions attended, the comments in the survey's open ended questions should reflect reasoned judgments and experience regarding clinic and tour content desired by NMRA members.

AGE – question 30

52% of respondents are 60 years of age or older, and 30% are 50- 59 years of age. This needs to be compared with our overall membership data to see if we are drawing consistently from all of our members.

MODELING SCALE – question 31

295 of respondents model in HO. The total of all scales modeled exceeds the 375 survey respondents. Clearly many respondents model more than one scale.

WHO ATTENDED WITH YOU – question 32

104 respondents indicated their spouse attended with them and 73 had a friend with them. Underscoring the social nature of the convention.

Questions 33, 34 and 35 were aimed at persons attending with the primary registrant, however the e-mail list utilized included spouse e-mails and the responses are inconsistent in number of respondents with the response to question 32, who attended with you. Thus the results for 33, 34 and 35 do not provide assistance in the area for which data was being sought.