

Activity Generator for MSTS

Activity Generator is a utility for Microsoft's Train Simulator™ (MSTS) that generates freight activities, with their own unique new work orders, for any MSTS Route.

- If there is already an Activity Creation Template available for the route, you need only download the template. Generating an activity is simply a matter of making a few menu choices. *You do NOT need to learn or use the MSTS Activity Editor™ to do this.*
- If there isn't an Activity Creation Template for your route, you can request that we create one by going to our User Forum at <http://skylinecomputing.com/forums/>

Or, if you're willing to work with or learn the MSTS Activity Editor™, we supply a full step by step procedure for creating your own Activity Creation Templates for any route with the included user's manual (available for free download at <http://www.skylinecomputing.com/Readme%20-%20SLG%20Manual.pdf>)

The program is targeted to three types of users:

The casual train-simmer. There is a huge appetite in the MSTS community for activities to run on all the great routes out there. While there are many good activities available for some routes, there aren't for all routes. Also a problem with any "scripted" activity, however good, is that it's a lot like a crossword puzzle: fun and challenging to work through the first time, but not as fun after that when all the solutions are known! The activity designer may have created a great "world", with cars on the spurs, interesting AI trains and traffic, etc., but the activity can lose its luster when replayed a number of times.

Enter Activity Generator! End users can create fresh activities from "Activity Creation Templates" over and over again, never having exactly the same pickups or setouts at exactly the same spurs. Some of the combinations can be real brain-teasers! In a manner similar to the "explore a route" screen, users can also alter the weather, season and start time for the activity just before running it, and change the locomotives they'll operate. Also like "Explore a Route" YOU select where you'll start, and what sidings you'll work. You can start with a full train or build one at the beginning of the activity. The choice is yours – the control is in YOUR hands!

Another feature aimed at the train-simmer with limited time or interest is the ability to tailor the activity to meet his or her time needs. The user can tell the program how many total cars to pick up at industry spurs, and how many cars maximum to pick up at each spur. Users can even select which spurs will be considered by the program to be worked. So, if the player has just spent a hard day at work and just wants to spend an hour switching, or just driving a train, the player can choose just a few spurs, close to the activity's starting point, and come up with a work order that can be finished in fifteen

minutes or so. On the other hand, if a real challenge is what's wanted, Activity Generator can certainly create one!

How does the program work? It relies on "Activity Creation Templates", created by Skyline Computing or other Activity Generator users. These templates consist of a standard MSTS activity and all the normal, associated files (the activity .act file, the paths, services, etc.), PLUS, two special text files: one that describes all the spurs – their names, what type of car the industry there wants, how many cars the spur will hold, etc., and another that describes the initial "state" of the "world": what cars, of what types, are sitting where. The program then examines these files, and based on the user's input, will generate a brand new activity, along with a printable work order (and a workorder on the MSTS "F11" screen). New activities can be generated again and again. So the player can really get to know the "world" where the work will be done, and still have the variety to keep the simulation interesting!

The casual activity designer. So you've just installed a great route, and some good rolling stock and engines to run on it, but there aren't many activities out for it yet. What do you do? In the past, your only choice was to create new activities and then run them. That's ok, but it's a lot like writing your own novel, then reading it ... fun, but no mystery as to how it will end! With Activity Generator, instead of simply creating a single activity with a fixed start and end and work, you can create a "world", with cars on spurs, AI traffic, etc., saved as an Activity Creation Template. Then generate new activities from that template. Even you won't know how they'll end, and you'll need to figure out the best "solution" to get the work done!

To aid in doing this, Activity Generator comes with a utility that will read any activity file, and generate the needed text files, which are stored as "Comma separated values" or ".csv" files. There is only one "special trick": you need to go into the activity editor, and enter at least one "pick up cars" action for each consist on each spur. That basically tells the program that the cars are there, waiting to be picked up. Also for best results some editing of the CSV file will help, mainly so you can break the route apart in to "regions" where you might choose to work. This is all detailed in the included manual.

The Activity Author/Creator. Some activity authors who regularly create activities for distribution, have heard about Activity Generator and remarked "great, this program will put us out of business." NOT TRUE! Activity Generator is a tool, which can make the activity designer's job easier, and, more importantly, enable the activity designers to concentrate on the art of creating great worlds, with interesting traffic, appropriate cars in the spurs, etc. By creating Activity Creation Templates instead of merely scripted activities, the activity designer can build a world in which users can generate a nearly endless combination of fresh activities, all with the AI traffic, railcars on spurs, and other things that the activity designer put there. Also that same designer can use the newly created Activity Creation Template to generate regular "scripted" activities to post for use by those who don't have Activity Generator (yet!). Many activity authors have done just that. Designing an Activity Creation Template is a much better return on the designer's investment of time and creativity in writing the activity! You can forget about the

drudgery of selecting every specific pickup and set out ... let Activity Generator do that! Set up the cars in the spurs, and the path or paths the player should follow, and then distribute Activity Creation Templates which have virtually endless replayability. Users of Activity Generator are licensed to distribute their activity templates to whomever they wish, by whatever means they wish, for free or for sale. No restrictions!

And, if you don't want to limit yourself to creating activities for those who have the Activity Generator, you can, at the click of a button, generate activity after activity using your settings, so you can release a whole "activity pack", all just standard activities that can be distributed in the usual way to anyone, rather than just a single activity ... with about the same amount of work ... perhaps even a little less! (since you don't have to specify each pickup and setout for even ONE of the activities you'll send out).

Route Designers. How is this helpful to route designers? Let's say you've just finished pouring weeks, even months, of time, effort, thought and energy into creating a great route. But if people are going to download it and enjoy it, you'll need activities. So what do you do? Either you spend a lot of time designing activities to go with the route, or you enlist the aid of a number of activity designers and hope they "step up to the plate" and write great activities for your route. But as the designer, you'll usually know what sort of traffic would be working each of the spurs. So all you need to do is place the appropriate types of cars on the industry spurs, similar cars on the yard tracks so they can be picked up and set out at those spurs, and create a couple of Activity Generator templates! Perhaps one westbound, and one eastbound, with a number of different starting points (Activity Generator allows you to provide multiple starting points and player paths for the player to choose from, just like with "Explore a Route").

Now, with your route, some rolling stock, and just these two Activity Generator templates, players can enjoy your route and generate an endless variety of activities for it. Also, you can create 10 or 15 (really, as many as you want!) activities from your own template, so you can release a number of activity "packs" to go with your route, to be used by those simmers who don't have the Activity Generator.

To learn more about the Activity Generator program please visit www.skylinecomputing.com