Editorial COMMENT

Talk-Back Loudspeakers in Yards and Terminals

MORE efficient operation of railroad yards and terminals is being brought about by adaptations of two-way fixed location talk-back loudspeakers. This comparatively new form of communication has many advantages, one of which is direct voice calling and immediate answer between the two persons involved. The yardmaster ordinarily has direct charge of the operation of a yard, and, therefore, the control of the new communication system is centered in his office. A keen analysis is required, however, to plan an installation so that talk-back loudspeakers are placed in locations where they can be used conveniently by all the other men who are involved in operations in the yard.

For communication between the yardmaster and conductors or foremen of switching crews, the talk-back speakers are ordinarily located on pipe posts along the switching leads where these men work when switching cars. In addition, similar loudspeakers should be located at various other places where these crews may stop, such as outlying switches in the yard area, on the repair track, ice dock track, etc., so that calls can be made at any time on short notice. Also, talk-back loudspeakers can be provided at switches where arriving road trains enter the yard, so that the yardmaster can give directions for trains to pull in on a designated yard track. In some yards, talk-back speakers, located near the spots where locomotives and cabooses stand when trains are made up, are used effectively, instead of hand signals, to check the brake-line air pressure, and to give a "high-ball" for departure, thus saving several minutes. Also, talk-back speakers should be so located that the yardmaster can quickly communicate with car men in the yard and the skate men who work at the lower end of classification tracks, as well as yard clerks and others who handle waybills.

In yards with numerous tracks, spaced so closely that there is no clearance between tracks for a pipe post on which to mount a loudspeaker, the Southern has developed so-called dwarf and ground-line mountings for loudspeakers, as explained in the November, 1949, issue. Another idea, as installed in a yard in Mexico, is to place the loudspeaker in a concrete covered box, below ground line, as explained in the May, 1951, issue.

Thus, a point of importance, when planning a yard communication project, is to include all the talk-back loudspeakers that are required for the yardmaster to call all men involved in any phase of the operations in the yard. This policy is justified by the fact that these yard communications projects are making such outstanding savings in operating expenses that they pay for themselves in a short time and also improve service to the shipping public.

Double Track to Singie With C. T. C.

ON numerous sections of two-track main line, studies are now being made to determine the feasibility of changing from double-track to single-track which is to be equipped with centralized traffic control. Some men, who have made a lifetime study of railroad operations, have made remarks recently to the effect that "take up second track and you will be sorry". However, pre-conceived conclusions on either side of the question do not apply to all projects. Furthermore, a review of present-day circumstances, with respect to changing from double track to single track, seems to be in order.

Years ago, when much of the second track was built, the addition of a track was the only known means of relieving congestion on busy single track lines. In those days, much of the traffic was of a local nature, thereby resulting in short hauls. Present-day traffic, moving between larger cities, can be handled in longer trains at greater time spacing, which permits the efficient utilization of modern high-powered locomotives, operating at faster speeds. Thus, the requirements for track capacity are reduced by the fact that the number of trains has been reduced and the speed, when in motion, has been increased. Also, the important time loss caused by delays on sidings when operating by train orders can now be reduced to an acceptable minimum by the installation of centralized traffic control, including power switches and signals for authorizing train movements.

An important reason for immediate action to change from double track to single track in many instances is that the rail on one or both tracks is due for renewal. When the Milwaukee Road changed from double to single track, the renewal of rail on one track, instead of both on 67 miles, saved $1,500,000. The Boston & Maine made this change over 22 miles between Nashua, N. H., and Concord; the Erie now has such a project under way on 60 miles between Portage, N. Y. and Buffalo; and the Southern is planning such a change on an extended section south of Chattanooga, Tenn. The savings effected by projects of this nature are so outstanding that detailed studies of this nature might well be made wherever circumstances seem to indicate that changes would be practicable.