

## Railroads in space

### The railroad's final frontier — space

The international space station's new railcar made a test-run Monday on the first-ever railroad in space. The car will be used to ferry the robotic arm and other cargo from one end of the station to the other. The first section of track was delivered last week by the shuttle Atlantis.

The robotic arm is nearly 60 feet long when fully extended and has seven motorized joints. It is used for assembly and maintenance of the station's components.

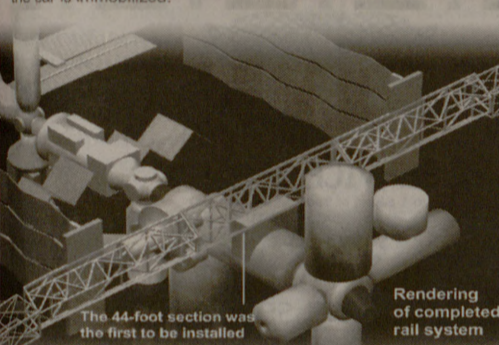
The two-pronged robotic hand can operate delicate assembly tasks that previously required astronauts.

The mobile base attaches to the railcar.

Mobile transporter The railcar travels at a top speed of one inch per second. It is attached by wheels above and below the rails.

Weight 1,950 pounds  
Height 3 feet  
Length 9 feet  
Width 8 feet  
Material aluminum  
Cargo capacity 23 tons

The rail The completed rail line will stretch more than 100 yards and have 10 stops along the way where the car is immobilized.



Rendering of completed rail system

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronauts sent the international space station's new railcar down a short stretch of track Monday in the inaugural run of the first permanent railroad in orbit.

But they soon encountered a snag, prompting NASA to interrupt the test.

"The solution for this is probably going to involve a lot of manual commanding from the ground," Mission Control informed the astronauts.

Space station resident Carl Walz got the railcar rolling Monday morning by sending computer commands from inside.

The empty flatcar crept along at less than two-tenths of an inch per second, then sped up to four-tenths of an inch per second as it traveled 17 3/4 feet and then stopped, on cue, at a designated work station. The car was automatically latching into place when a software message indicated a failure, just 10 minutes into the test.

Mission Control said there was nothing wrong with the railcar. Rather, magnetic sensors on the bottom of the car apparently lost contact with iron strips embedded in the aluminum track at the work-station locations, and the software halted the latching process.

"It's believed to be perfectly aligned, just a nuisance in the software and a learning process," Mission Control explained.

Despite the problem, NASA planned to move the railcar back and forth over the course of a few hours along a 26-foot section of the track that runs the full length of the space station's newly attached 44-foot girder. Most of the work was to be done by flight controllers.

Its top speed is one inch per second, but engineers did not intend to hit that.

The \$190 million railcar eventually will be used to transport the space station's robot arm from one end of the outpost to the other for construction work.

During a 6 1/2-hour spacewalk Sunday, shuttle Atlantis astronauts Steven Smith and Rex Walheim reworked part of the space station and set the stage for Monday's debut of the railcar.

See **Space** on page 8A

## Ways to detect anthrax attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — Monitoring sales of nonprescription drugs might help provide early detection of an anthrax attack, according to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University.

Early symptoms of deadly inhaled anthrax are similar to the flu, so a sudden increase in sales of flu medications could tip off authorities to check for anthrax before victims become ill enough to seek medical attention, the researchers suggest.

Anthrax has been the focus of much attention since last fall's anthrax-by-mail attacks that killed five people and sickened several others.

The Carnegie Mellon project was started long before those

"We are talking about exposures of thousands of people in a concentrated location..."

— Stephen E. Feinberg  
Carnegie Mellon University

attacks, said Stephen E. Feinberg of the university's department of statistics.

He said the focus is on larger scale attacks in an urban area, not the relatively limited hazard posed by the mailed germs.

"We are talking about expo-

sures of thousands of people in a concentrated location, and then you've got very large-scale impact to assess and every second counts," Feinberg said.

Their report is published in Tuesday's issue of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Meanwhile, the Army this week is launching a series of experiments to see if clouds of chemical or biological agents like anthrax can be detected on radar.

There will be test sprays a few miles from Key West, Fla., using safe materials with properties similar to potential threats to see if the radars can tell them from rain or clouds.

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