

EMPIRE BUILDER

A North American Freight Charter · Rulebook



The charter map. Every coastline, lake, river and boundary is real, and every city sits at its true longitude and latitude. Red rosettes are the seven major terminals.

The charter

You hold a charter to build a railroad in North America. So do your rivals. The charter is discharged, and the game won, by the first railroad to bring 6 of the continent's 7 major terminals onto one connected system and hold \$250M in the treasury at the close of a season.

Neither half is optional. A railroad that builds everywhere and hauls nothing runs out of money and stops; a railroad that hauls short freight forever and never leaves its home district never reaches six terminals. The whole game is the trade between the two.

The map

The board is a survey sheet of 2208 mileposts on a 48 by 46 grid, of which 1075 are buildable land. It was generated from published coastline, lake, river and physical-geography data on a Lambert conformal conic projection with standard parallels at 33 and 45 degrees north. One milepost to the next is about 130 kilometres.

Ocean and lake mileposts cannot be built on at all, which is why the Great Lakes turn traffic through Chicago and Toronto and why the Gulf of California keeps Baja off the network.

Ground and what it costs

GROUND	PER MILEPOST	WHERE
Plain	\$1M	Prairie, plains, the Midwest, coastal flats
Desert	\$1M	Great Basin, Mojave, Sonoran, Chihuahuan
Forest	\$2M	Boreal north, Pacific slope, north woods
Hills	\$2M	Appalachian belt, Ozarks, Laurentians, Coast Ranges
Swamp	\$2M	Louisiana delta, Florida, Tabasco
Mountain	\$2M	Cascades, main Rockies, Sierra Madre, Appalachian core
Alpine pass	\$5M	Canadian Rockies, Colorado high country, Sierra Nevada
River crossing	+\$2M	Added to the cost of that one milepost
Town	\$2M	In place of the ground cost
City	\$3M	In place of the ground cost
Major terminal	\$5M	In place of the ground cost

Cities

There are 102 cities. Towns are single mileposts. Cities are single mileposts with more industry. The seven major terminals — Vancouver, Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, Chicago, New York and Mexico City — occupy their own milepost and the six around it, so a line that reaches any of those seven mileposts has reached the terminal.

A city produces the commodities its region actually produces. Denver ships machinery and coal; Sudbury ships nickel and copper; Veracruz ships coffee and sugar; Washington produces nothing at all and only ever buys.

The season

Seasons 1 and 2 are charter seasons. There is no running phase: you survey and lay line, up to \$20M each season, and nothing else. Every railroad starts with \$60M, with \$3M more for each seat further down the table.

From season 3 on, a turn is a running phase followed by a building phase.

Running phase

- Your train has movement points equal to its speed. Entering a milepost costs one point, city or not.
- You may run over your own line for nothing. Running over a rival's line costs \$4M paid to that railroad, once per season however far you go on it.
- Standing in a city you may load any commodity that city produces, free, as long as you have an empty car.
- Standing in a city you may set down a load that a contract in your order book wants there. You collect the fee, discard that contract and draw a fresh one.
- You may load, set down and set out as often as you like, whenever the train is standing in a city, including before it moves and after it stops.
- Instead of running at all you may return the whole order book for three new contracts. That costs you the season's running.

Building phase

- You may spend up to \$20M on new line.
- Your first length of line may start at any city on the map. Every length after that must join the system you already own, so your railroad is always one connected network.
- Any length laid this season may be taken up again at full refund before the season closes.
- At most 3 railroads may reach any one town or city. The major terminals are open to all comers.
- Instead of laying any track you may buy a locomotive for \$20M. That takes the whole building phase.

A railroad that begins a season with less than \$8M is topped up to \$8M against its mail contract. A road can be driven to the wall in this game, but it cannot be locked out of it.

Motive power

LOCOMOTIVE	MILEPOSTS	CARS	UPGRADES TO
Drover	9	2	Flyer or Hauler
Flyer	12	2	Superhauler
Hauler	9	3	Superhauler
Superhauler	12	3	—

Every step costs \$20M. Capacity earns money on dense networks where several contracts can be served on one circuit; speed earns money on long hauls between distant regions.

The order book

You hold 3 contracts. Each names three demands: a commodity, the city that wants it, and the fee. Fees run from \$11M to \$54M and were set from how far the nearest source of that commodity actually is from the city asking, so a Vancouver contract for coffee pays what the distance says it should.

The deck holds 120 contracts and 24 event cards. Drawing an event resolves it at once and you draw again, so an event never costs you a contract. When the deck runs out the discards are shuffled back.

Finding the freight

A contract names a commodity and the city that wants it, but not where the commodity is raised, and with a hundred and two cities on the board that is the harder half of the problem. Click any demand in the order book to mark it: every city that produces that commodity is ringed with a dashed circle and a chevron pointing into it, the destination takes a double ring, and a caption under the book lists the nearest sources with their distance in mileposts. The names in that caption are buttons that take the map to them. Click the demand again to clear the marks.

Events

EVENT	EFFECT
Derailment	The drawing railroad loses every load and runs at half speed next season.
Heavy snow	Mountain and alpine mileposts are shut for one round.
Spring flood	Every river crossing is shut for one round.
Coastal gale	Cities on tidewater are closed for one round.
Excess profits tax	Every railroad pays a fifth of its treasury above \$100M.
Steel shortage	All construction costs half again as much for one round.
Yard strike	One major terminal, chosen at random, is closed for one round.

A round runs until the drawing railroad's next turn, so an event drawn early in the order falls hardest on the roads that follow.

Winning

At the close of every season the books are examined and every railroad is checked at once. Any road with 6 of the 7 major terminals on one system and \$250M in hand has discharged its charter; if more than one qualifies in the same season, the larger treasury takes it. Judging at the end of the season rather than the moment the condition is met means the last seat gets exactly as many turns as the first.

If no road has finished by season 240 the strongest system on the board — treasury, terminals reached and mileposts built — is declared the winner.

At the table

ACTION	HOW
Pan the map	Drag it, or use the arrow keys
Zoom	Mouse wheel, or + and -
Fit the whole map	The Fit button, or f
Find your train	The Train button
Run or build to a milepost	Click any lit milepost

Standing orders	The Rules button, or ?
Close a dialog	Esc
Touch screens	One finger pans; a tap acts on a milepost

The map is lit gold during a running phase and red during a building phase. A lit milepost is one you can reach with what is left of the season, and clicking it does the whole job: the train runs the shortest legal route, or the line is laid along the cheapest alignment.

The game writes itself to browser storage after every action and offers to resume from the opening screen. Nothing leaves the browser.