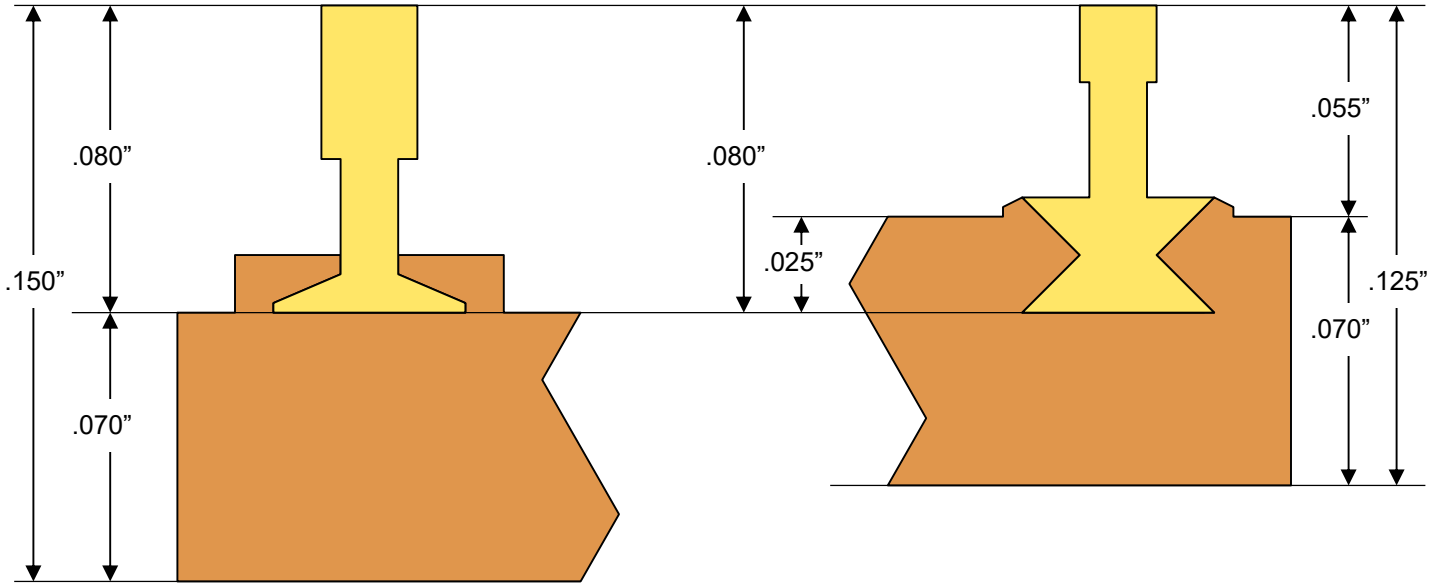
Atlas Code 80 Vs Peco Code 55

Lee Williams

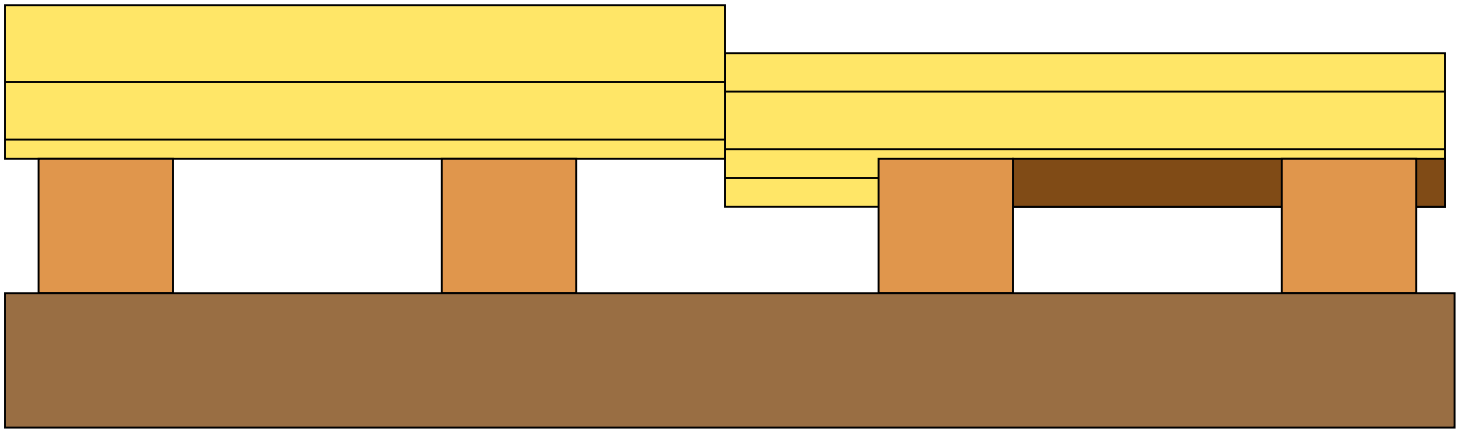
The N-Trak Manual specifies code 80 track. However, many people prefer Peco code 55 track for its prototypical appearance and better durability. So let's compare the rails on the two types of track. Both types have a rail that's 0.080 inches in height (code 80) and ties that are 0.070 inches in height. The Atlas code 80 track sits on top of the ties with molded in "spikes" to hold the rails to the ties. The Peco code 55 track has a second flange on lower part of the rail and is embedded 0.025 inches into the ties. The top of the rail is 0.055 inches (code 55) above the top of the ties. This makes the track considerably more durable, which is useful for a module which is frequently set up, taken down and transported around. This also cause the overall height of the track to be 0.125 inches, which is 0.025 inches less than the 0.150 inch overall height of the Atlas code 80 track.



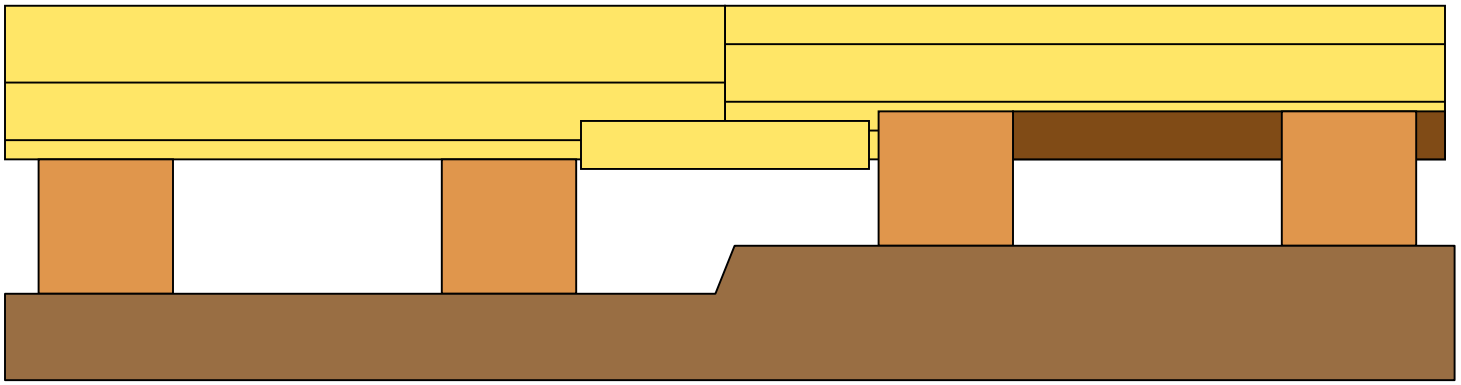
Atlas Code 80 **Peco Code 55**

The question is how do you join modules together that use Peco code 55 track? If you are joining two modules with Peco code 55 track, such as mated modules with non-standard tracks, just make a joiner track by cutting pieces of Peco code 55 track to the required length. Remember that since the rail is embedded in the tie, you can't slide the rail joiner between the rail and the tie. You'll need to cut enough ties off of one end of the joiner track for the entire length of rail joiner. You can then use .020" by .060" strips of basswood or styrene as non-functional ties under the rail joiners.

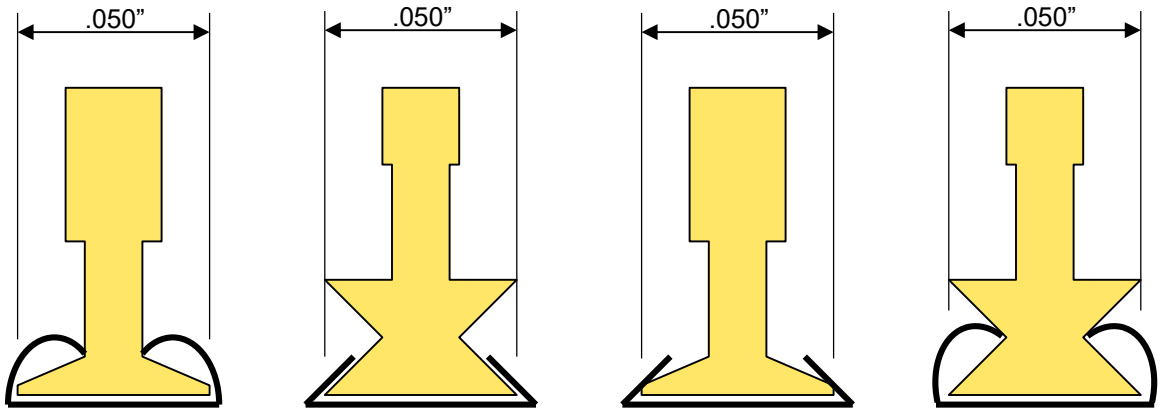
However, it isn't feasible to always use Peco code 55 joiner tracks for modules with standard interfaces that are connected to different modules in different layouts. These modules will need to be compatible with Atlas joiner tracks. The problem here is the difference in overall height of the track causes the rails to have a vertical misalignment of 0.025 inches as shown below.



To solve this problem the N-Trak manual recommends using Atlas track for the last inch or two on the module. However, this negates the durability advantage of the Peco code 55 track, since the ends of the module track are subject to the most wear and tear due to repeatedly connecting and removing the joiner tracks. A better solution is to sand down the last two and half inches of the roadbed by 0.025 inches. This allows the Atlas code 80 and Peco code 55 rails to align vertically as shown below.



The final question is which type of rail joiner do you use when joining Atlas code 80 to Peco code 55? The width of the bottom flanges on both types of track is 0.050 inches so either type of rail joiner will work as show below.



Atlas Code 80 w/ Atlas Rail Joiner

Peco Code 55 w/ Peco Rail Joiner

Atlas Code 80 w/ Peco Rail Joiner

Peco Code 55 w/ Atlas Rail Joiner

The Peco rail joiner doesn’t fit as snugly on the Atlas rail as the Atlas rail joiner. Conversely, an Atlas rail joiner needs to be spread a little to fit on the Peco code 55 rail. This causes the rail joiner to be little loose if later used on a module with Atlas track. The Atlas rail joiner also has the advantage of being easier to push with a tool to slide the rail joiner when installing or removing the joiner track. I prefer using the Atlas rail joiners, and keeping a supply of extra Atlas rail joiners, in case the used ones become too loose. I also use a triangular needle file to file the notch between the flanges on the end of the Peco code 55 rail, as shown below. This helps to spread the Atlas rail joiner when it’s slid onto the rail.