

OPENTTD IS AN ENTRANCING AND JOYFUL TYCOON GAME THAT YOU CAN PLAY FOR FREE... RIGHT NOW - A TIMELY REVIEW

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Hello everybody and welcome back to another [Timely Review](#). Last time, we looked at the [second of Chris Sawyer's iconic RollerCoaster Tycoon games](#), but his gaming catalogue consists of more than just immaculate theme park builders. Prior to both of his RCT games, Sawyer also developed Transport Tycoon, which is a game that's about running a transport company, developing road, train, boat, and airplane infrastructure to transport people and goods from place to place. Just like RollerCoaster Tycoon, Transport Tycoon would also see an expansion being released as it was re-released later as Transport Tycoon Deluxe.

What I'm going to talk about today is... not quite that. OpenTTD is an open-source recreation of Transport Tycoon Deluxe into a "new" game for modern systems. Unlike RCT1 and 2, no version of Transport Tycoon has ever been digitally redistributed, meaning that the only convenient way to play any version of Transport Tycoon is through OpenTTD. For just about every practical purpose that can be thought of, this means basically nothing, but if you're really hankering to play the original unmodded game for some reason, it's not exactly going to be a smooth ride to get there. Chris Sawyer doesn't have any involvement in OpenTTD, but it's easier to count it as such for the purpose of this small marathon I'm doing.

Unlike OpenRCT2, OpenTTD does not require any files from the original Transport Tycoon to be played (and thank heavens because that would make it very inaccessible). Instead, all you have to do is just download the game and boom, you can instantly play it. Like OpenRCT2 though, the game is entirely free to download and play*, so all of you can literally play it right now if you want to, though you should wait until after you finish reading this review before you do so. Despite the fact that OpenTTD is not claimed to stand for anything, it very obviously is supposed to mean "Open Transport Tycoon Deluxe". Gotta get around those trademarks.

Transport Tycoon originally came out in 1994 for MS-DOS, with an improved version, Transport Tycoon Deluxe, releasing in 1995. OpenTTD was first available to play in March of 2004 and continues to be developed by the OpenTTD team.

**OpenRCT2 itself is free, but it does require RollerCoaster Tycoon 2 installed to work, which most likely will not be free, although it's always very cheap to buy on Steam or GoG.*

PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES!



If it looks like RollerCoaster Tycoon and feels like RollerCoaster Tycoon...

OpenTTD is a game where you are in control of your own transporting company, which you do by building roads, train tracks, docks, and airports, and supplying those routes with the necessary vehicles and giving them orders to move somewhere to grab cargo and then deliver it to its proper destination. All the while, you may or may not have other transport companies around you doing the same thing, trying to claim the title of best transport company. Over time, you'll receive subsidiaries asking you to deliver a certain cargo to a certain destination and if your company is the first to do so, you'll receive a little leg up on the competition and opportunities to try out new vehicles before they're "officially" invented.

Like all tycoon games, Transport Tycoon comes with its own group of scenarios, but here is where an important element needs to be shared. While OpenRCT2 comes with all the scenarios from its base game already integrated, OpenTTD does not. If you have the files for the original game on your computer (which would be quite astounding in today's day and age), you can transfer the scenario files to your OpenTTD scenario folder, but OpenTTD does not come with any scenarios pre-installed. Instead, it has the option to check for online content which allows you to download scenarios, vehicle models, AI packages, and anything you need to make OpenTTD your moddable transporting paradise.

Where Transport Tycoon (both the original game and OpenTTD) differs from RollerCoaster Tycoon is its ability to create randomly generated maps and heightmaps from achromatic images. It does not have an official tutorial mode, but a tutorial scenario made by an official OpenTTD developer can be downloaded and played. That scenario will teach the basics you need to know to get your feet wet, but making the full-body dive otherwise takes a "learn by doing" approach. This is easy enough for the trucks, boats, and aircraft, but making proper, efficient railroad networks is quite difficult to learn unless you have a degree in railway engineering. OpenTTD is fairly easy to jump into and mess around, but properly learning will definitely take a lot of effort.

THERE'S NO TRAIN-ING WHEELS HERE ON THIS MACHINE





The snow is the least of your problems here.

OpenTTD has two ways you can play it. You can play it with AI opponents to try to outdo their transporting business, or you can play it entirely by yourself and use the whole map as your transportation oyster. The latter option is the one that's more conducive to the serene feeling of watching your networks work in perfect synchronicity, and if you're picking up the game for the first time, this is the one that I would recommend you start out with because it gives you as the player much less pressure when trying to figure out how to play the game. If you're going for a relaxing game session to unwind, this is a perfect option to do exactly that.

Playing with AI enabled gives the game a more "game-y" feeling, and this can be fun if you want to challenge yourself to see how you build against the other companies. I don't recommend that new players do this, since it gives you much more pressure to beat the competition to everything at every opportunity, which will eventually lead to a lot of problems with your company if you're still taking some time to learn the game. Once you feel comfortable with how everything works, though, this option can be an exciting and intense change of pace over the sandbox-y feeling of solo play. OpenTTD does not come with AI by default, but there are several different AI packages that can be downloaded and integrated into the game. SimpleAI is the one that's intended to function the most like an improved version of the original Transport Tycoon AI.

Regardless of if you play with AI or not, learning the game properly is fairly difficult. I already talked about how train networks are set up, but there's a lot of information to learn, and the game is not as beginner-friendly as something like RollerCoaster Tycoon. When I first played the game, I had to look up how to rotate the camera, only to find out that you literally can't even do that at all. I can't knock the game too much for this since it's modeled after an old PC game from over 30 years ago where the option to do that might've been too resource-intensive to implement back then, but if you're very familiar with other isometric tycoon games that allow you to do this, the lack of ability to rotate the camera might feel incredibly restrictive and missing a key component.

There are a lot of menus, icons, and functionalities that require you to pretty much fumble about with them until you get it right. Even though OpenTTD has made a lot of improvements over the original game over its 20-year lifespan, do remember that you are still playing what is essentially a PC game from 1994, just with a fancier backend than what it would've had back then

ALL ABOARD, HA HA HA HA!





Things do get a little off the rails (on a crazy train!)

The original game predictably uses a very similar presentation to the two RollerCoaster Tycoon games down to the UI design, similar text usage, and sprite work. Simon Foster, the artist of the two RollerCoaster Tycoon games, also produced the sprites for the original Transport Tycoon, which were carried over to OpenTTD. Allister Brimble however had no involvement in the original game, and instead all the music in the original game was composed by John Broomhall. Unlike OpenRCT2, none of the music from the original game carries over to OpenTTD. Instead, OpenTTD by default uses its own soundtrack composed specifically for it, and the soundtrack, which I personally think sounds great. If you want to have a groovy time working on a personal project (like... building a transport network), just turn it on and boom! Personally, my favorite song in the game is Midnight Snow Run.

As for the look of the game, it's expectedly very reminiscent of RollerCoaster Tycoon. The game gives you a choice of four different climate types. The Temperate, Sub-Arctic, and Sub-Tropical climates use a realistic design akin to the grass, snow, and desert scenarios akin to what you'd find in Chris Sawyer's other games. They have slightly different rule-sets and their own set of vehicles, but the change is mostly visual. The Toyland climate gets a little off the rails though because it takes any realism and throws it out the window in favor of houses made of shoes and building blocks, forests made of cotton candy trees, and factories made out of soda cans.

As one of maybe four people on this entire planet that actually likes the Toyland climate (although I will admit that some of the sound effects lose their charm pretty quickly), the game looks great. I realize that I am biased because I grew up with Simon Foster's sprite work in the RCT games, but it's not my fault that little kid me was able to recognize Foster's great art skills. The art style of RollerCoaster Tycoon is one of the many reasons the game has the legacy that it has today, and that artistic charm is also present in Transport Tycoon. The community has also created its own art assets, which you can download and play with.





It's not a Chris Sawyer game without this feature (unless it's RCT1).

As you've probably guessed reading the rest of this review... or if you've played the game before, or are familiar with open-source games in general... one of the big selling points of OpenTTD is how moddable it is. The game pretty much only comes with the barebones of what you actually need to play it, and you're free to customize all the options or download some mods as you wish. As the game has its own scenario editor (just like Chris Sawyer's other games), it's easy to contribute to the custom content scene if you want to, just like that.

In stark contrast to a lot of games that are dependent on being moddable, OpenTTD is actually perfectly playable and still a lot of fun as a full game, you ignore all of the custom content entirely. If you want to, the ability to download a lot of community content is there to sink your teeth into with new scenarios, art assets, and so much more. You are by no means required to do this to have a good time, though, and you're perfectly able to play the game by downloading it and going ham with what it already comes with. In that vein, it is basically a fancier Transport Tycoon Deluxe, so if you're just interested in playing Transport Tycoon, then there you go!

HOW DOES IT... DELIVER?



Happy negative-15th birthday to me from Pontbridge (I didn't even mean to do that).

Because of its free price tag, customizability, and ability to jump in and instantly play, the game has a very low floor to enter, although its second floor (or "first floor" for the British) is dramatically higher than its ground floor, and the ceiling is much higher than that. Indeed, the game is easy to get into and start playing, but that doesn't mean the game holds your hand because you haven't played it before.

If you're familiar with how railroad engineering works (through either other railroad management games or real life), you're going to have the time of your life building the train infrastructure. If you aren't, then you should not expect an easy time building your company, but it will feel incredibly rewarding if you're able to put in the effort to learn. If you're having trouble, the groovy music and nostalgic isometric style will be able to encourage you to keep trying until you get it right.

OpenTTD is definitely not flawless, from its difficulty to learn, some dated design elements, and lackluster ship AI, but it's a very fun tycoon game with many of the same charm that RollerCoaster Tycoon has. As much as I've harped about the game not being too beginner-friendly, I'd say it's absolutely worth a try if you're a fan of RollerCoaster Tycoon as you'll find many elements about that game that you love to also be present in OpenTTD. The best part is that it's literally free, so there is literally no cost at all if it turns out that you didn't like it. OpenTTD can be added to your game library through [Steam](#), [GOG](#), or its [official website](#).

Transport Tycoon never had an official sequel, but Chris Sawyer would release a spiritual successor to this game 10 years later, and that's exactly the game that we're looking at next time. That's right; In my next Timely Review, we'll be taking a look at Chris Sawyer's Locomotion.

Have you played either Transport Tycoon or OpenTTD before and do you have fond memories of the game? Let us know what you think in the comments below.