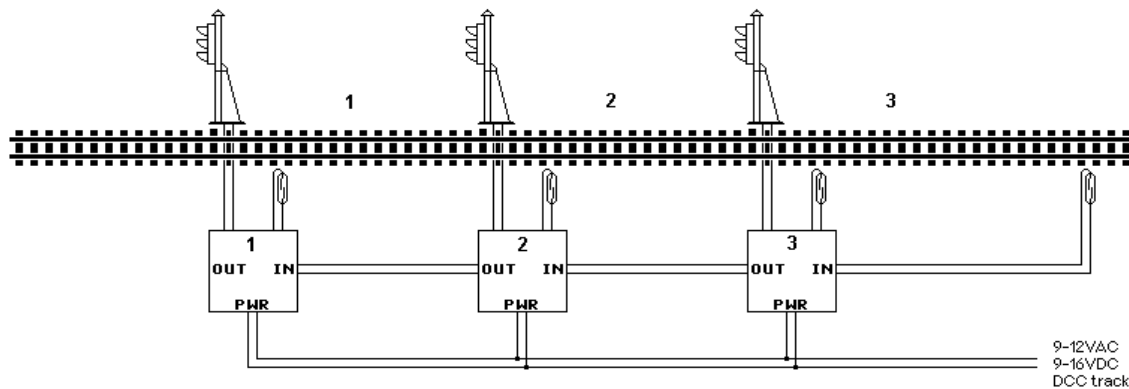


# Block Signal Controller

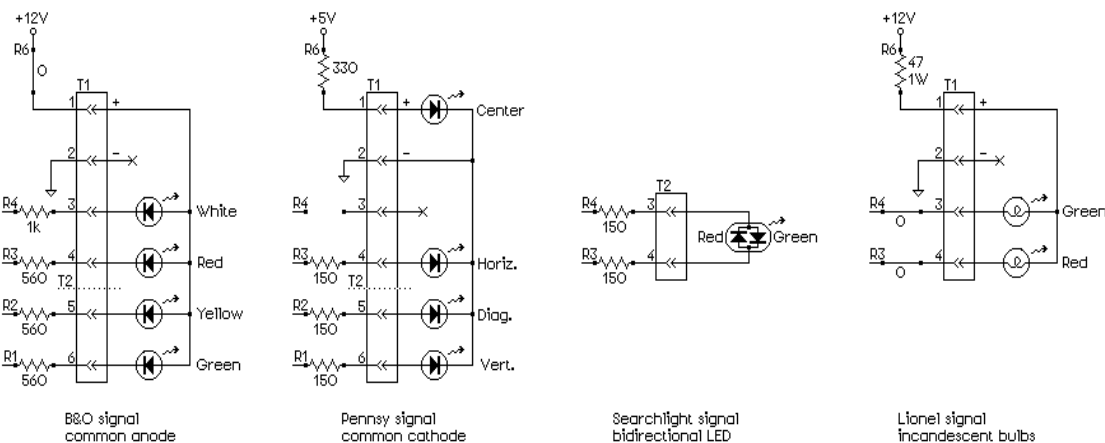
The controller circuit board is designed to use a magnetic reed switch to detect the presence of trains. There are two versions: prototypical and timer. Prototypical operation requires several boards to be interconnected so they can display red, yellow, and green lights (or aspects, such as with Pennsy positional signals) trailing behind trains as they travel from block to block. The timer version is simpler. It operates a single signal independent of any others. Red is displayed when a train passes, after a few seconds yellow is displayed, and after a few more seconds the signal turns back to green.

Cables connect the board to a reed switch and power source. A third cable is required for prototypical operation that chains boards together. If the boards are not connected in a complete loop then an extra reed switch is needed to terminate each chain of signals. Note that the last board, shown on the right, is connected to the reed switch at its INPUT socket.



## Configurations

Before soldering the components onto the circuit board, you need to determine how it will be configured for your signal. Most signals have LEDs wired with either their anodes connected together or their cathodes connected together. A searchlight signal might have a bidirectional red/green LED with only two leads. Other signals have incandescent bulbs that require more power.



1. The first thing to determine is how your signal will be connected to the circuit board: with a miniature plug or with screw terminals?

The advantage of the miniature plug is that it makes it easy to attach the signal to the circuit board mounted under the layout. The six-pin plug requires a 5/16" hole in the layout (that can be later covered with scenery and held with hot glue). If your signal does not have a yellow light (aspect) then you can probably get by with a four-pin plug that passes through a 1/4" hole. Resistors attached to the leads of the signal are clipped off and mounted on the circuit board. Values can be substituted to adjust brightness. One pin of the plug is removed and the corresponding hole in the socket is obstructed to "key" the connector, thus preventing it from being plugged in wrong. Soldering wires onto the miniature (2 mm spacing) plug is the most difficult step of assembling this kit.

On the other hand, most commercial boards use screw terminals, and that's an option here. The advantage is that individual wires on the signal can be passed through an even smaller hole, and any resistors can be left attached to the wires. The disadvantage is that sometimes it's difficult to connect the individual wires to the correct terminals under the layout.

2. How many connections are needed: six, four, or two? If there is no yellow light (aspect) then a four-pin plug or four-screw terminal is sufficient. If the signal has a bidirectional red/green LED with only two leads then a two-screw terminal is sufficient. (A four-pin plug is still used in this last case because it prevents plugging in backwards.)

3. Which voltage will your signals use: rectified input or regulated five volts? This determines the position of the resistor R6. In many

cases R6 is just a (0 ohm) jumper wire that connects the rectified input voltage. Common cathode LEDs (such as on Pennsy positional signals) must use the regulated five volts, so R6 is installed in that position. Incandescent bulbs use the rectified input voltage. If they were originally powered from an AC source then R6 has a value that compensates for the voltage increase due to rectification (typically 47 ohms for 12 VAC).

4. An LED must always have a resistor connected in series. Will this resistor be mounted on the board or is it attached to the signal? If the resistor is on the board, what value is it? If you know the voltage your signal runs from (typically 12 VDC) then a brightness adjustment tool (a rheostat, which will be provided at the clinic) can be used to determine this value.

If you have any doubts about the configuration needed for your signal, have it verified by Loren Blaney.

## Recommended tools

Your block signal  
Soldering iron with small tip, holder, and sponge  
Needle-nose pliers  
Wire nipper (Xuron track cutter works well)  
Wire stripper (for 24 gauge cables and possibly signal leads)  
Bright light (for close-up soldering)  
Eye protection (for close-up soldering, which can sometimes spatter)  
Extension cord  
Power outlet strip  
Tweezers  
Small screwdriver (for screw terminal, if used)  
Small container for trash  
Phillips screwdriver #1 (for mounting circuit board on layout)  
Any kind of tape (to hold sockets straight while soldering)  
Volt-ohm meter  
Heat gun or cigarette lighter (for heat-shrink tubing)  
Hot glue gun  
"Helping hands" (to hold parts while soldering)  
Opti-visor (to inspect solder joints)

## Parts

Kit parts vary depending on the version and the requirements of your signal.

Quan.	Item	Description	Supplier/Part no.
1		Printed circuit board	Advanced Circuits
1	D1	Bridge rectifier, DF04M, 1A, DIP	Jameco 102971
1	(IC1)	Socket, IC, 14-pin DIP	Jameco 112214
1	c (IC2)	Socket, IC, 16-pin DIP	Jameco 112222
1	C3	Capacitor, 0.1uF radial ceramic, "104"	Jameco 544868
1	R7	Resistor, 10k ohm 1/4 W	Jameco 691104
1	p R5	Resistor, 560 ohm 1/4 W	Jameco 690806
4	+ R1-R4	Resistors, 1/4 W, determine LED brightness	Jameco 10664
1	+ R6	Resistor, 1 W or jumper wire (see text)	JB Saunders
1	+ R8	Resistor, 3.3k ohm 1/4 W (for photocell)	Jameco 690988
1	t SW1	Rotary DIP Switch, 16 position	Jameco 139652
1	+ S4	Socket, 2 mm six-hole	JB Saunders
2	S1	Sockets, 0.100" two-hole (REED)	Digi-Key S7000-ND
2	p S2,S3	Sockets, 0.100" three-hole (INPUT/OUTPUT)	Digi-Key S7001-ND
2	P1	Headers, 0.100" two-pin (9-12VAC)	Digi-Key WM6002-ND
1	+ T1	Terminal block, 4 screws	Jameco 2124411
1	+ T2	Terminal block, 2 screws	Jameco 2094506
1	+ C4	Capacitor, 6.8uF 35V tantalum dipped	Jameco 33873
1	C2	Capacitor, 22uF 16V radial	Jameco 1946295
1	C1	Capacitor, 470uF 35V radial	Jameco 93817
1	IC3	LM7805AC, 5V regulator, 1.5A	Jameco 924570
1	IC1	PIC16F684-I/P, microcontroller, programmed	Jameco 312590
1	c IC2	ULN2003, Darlington driver, DIP-16	Jameco 34278
5		Feet wire, 24 gauge, two-conductor, stranded	Jameco 100299
15	p	Feet wire, 24 gauge, two-conductor, stranded	Jameco 100299
2	p P2,P3	Headers, 0.100" three-pin	Digi-Key WM6003-ND
1		Magnetic reed switch	Digi-Key HE503-ND
1		3/16" heat-shrink tube, 1-1/4" long, clear	JB Saunders
4		Wood screws, #4 1/2" Phillips	McGuckin Hardware
4		Spacers, mounting, 5/32" #4	JB Saunders sold out
8		Rare earth magnets, rod 1/8x1/8"	Magcraft.com NSN0658
1/2		Foot jumper wire, bare copper	
2		Feet solder, rosen-core	
	t	timer version	
	p	proto version	
	c	unused by common cathode and bidirectional red/green LEDs	
	+	option	



15. Insert the three-pin voltage regulator (IC3, it looks like a big transistor). Be sure to orient it with its metal tab toward the center of the board (where is says TAB SIDE). Solder and trim.

16. Don't plug any ICs into sockets until the Testing section below.

## Cables

The cable that connects the reed switch to the circuit board is made as follows.

**WARNING:** Never bend the leads on a reed switch without supporting them with pliers, otherwise the glass tube will very likely break. (Believe me, I know.)

1. Peel apart about 1-1/2" of the twin wires on about a one-foot length of 24 gauge cable. Trim the wires to match the leads on the reed switch. One wire will be about 3/8" shorter than the other. (It doesn't matter which lead attaches to the wire with the white stripe.) Strip 1/4" of insulation from the wires and twist the strands together.

2. Tin the leads on the wires and on the reed switch by coating them with solder.

3. Solder the wires onto the reed switch. The tinning process makes this easier. It's often unnecessary to apply more solder.

4. Encapsulate the reed switch in a piece of 3/16" heat-shrink tubing about 1-1/4" long. Use a heat gun (lighter, match, or soldering iron) to heat the tubing until it shrinks evenly around the reed switch. The tubing should not extend above the top of the glass tube.

5. Attach a two-pin connector to the wires at the opposite end of the reed switch as follows.

6. Strip 1/8" insulation off both leads of the twin-lead wire. Strip both leads at the same time using ordinary wire strippers. Tin the leads.

7. Align the stripped ends with a two-pin connector as shown in the photo. The short end of the connector is the solder end. Use a screwdriver to slightly spread the wire leads if needed to get a good alignment with the connector.

8. Solder the wires to the connector.

9. Apply a dab of hot glue to the gap between the wire leads to prevent them from ever shorting.

10. Make a power cable by cutting off a length of twin-lead wire and attaching one end to a two-hole connector, like was done for the reed switch cable but using a two-hole connector instead of a two-pin connector.

11. For the prototypical version, make a cable that connects the INPUT to the OUTPUT of another board. Allow enough length of twin lead wire to span between signals, plus some extra. Solder the three-pin connectors onto each end. The lead with the white stripe goes to the center pin, and the other lead goes to an outer pin (it doesn't matter which). If the inputs and outputs of the boards are not connected in a complete loop then a long reed switch cable is needed that connects to the INPUT of the last board (see figure on page 1). The two pins of the reed cable can plug into either side of the three-hole socket.



## Signal connector

Skip this section if you're using screw terminals to connect your signal.

1. The order of the pins on the miniature connector is indicated on the circuit board. Signals without a yellow aspect connect green to the white (W) output. (White is on when red is off.) Soldering the pins is moderately difficult because of their small size and because the plug can easily melt.

2. Insert the plug into the socket on the board. This not only anchors it but also helps keep it from melting.

3. Twist any strands on the leads of the signal together and tin them with solder. Tin the pins on the plug, then tack the leads onto the plug. Verify that the connections are correct.

4. Remove the plug. Key it by clipping off an unused pin and inserting it into the corresponding hole in the socket.

5. Reinforce the wire connections to the plug with a dab of hot glue.

## Testing

Before inserting the ICs, verify that everything works properly as follows.

1. Plug the power cable into the two pins extending up from the board, and connect the other end to a power source appropriate for your signal: DCC track, 9 to 12 volt AC wall transformer, or any 9 to 16 volt DC source (polarity doesn't matter).
2. With a meter verify that there are 5.0 volts between holes 1 and 14 on the socket for IC1 (they are on the end next to C3). If the voltage is wrong, do not insert the ICs until the problem is corrected.
3. Unplug the power cable.
4. Plug the ICs into their respective sockets (there is only one IC for the common cathode configuration) being sure to orient them correctly. The dimples in the ICs go next to the holes labeled "1." Make sure all the pins go into the holes.
5. Connect your signal. (A signal without a yellow lead connects its green lead to the W output--white is on when red is off.) If the signal is connected wrong, it won't damage anything (unless you connect an LED of the right polarity without a series resistor across the + and - terminals).
6. Plug the reed switch cable into the board at the label REED (S1).
7. If the rotary timer switch is installed, set it to 1. The TIME DURATION is equal to the position number times four seconds, so for this test the signal will change four seconds after being triggered. (The letter A = 10, times 4 gives 40 seconds; F = 15, times 4 gives one minute.)
8. Connect the power. The green light (aspect) should appear.
9. Use a magnet to momentarily close the reed switch. The signal should turn red.
10. If there is no rotary timer switch, such as with the prototypical version, the other aspects can be tested by connecting a reed switch to the INPUT socket, and activating it with a magnet.

## Mounting

1. Near the location of the signal on the layout, drill a 3/16" hole in the center of the track for the reed switch. (Three-rail track requires the hole to be off-center.) Insert the reed switch from the underside of the layout and glue (Goop) it in place. It should extend up about 1/32" below the top of the rails. A block of wood placed on the rails helps to measure this distance.

2. Attach a 1/8x1/8" super magnet, with its poles (axis) oriented up and down, under an engine at its center near the front. (For 3-rail track mount a pair of magnets side-by-side so the reed will activate when the train travels in either direction.) It might not be necessary to glue the magnet if it attaches to some metal. The magnet must pass within 1/8" of a reed switch to activate it.

3. For the prototypical version, a magnet must also be attached under a caboose (or other rear-end car) at its center near the rear.

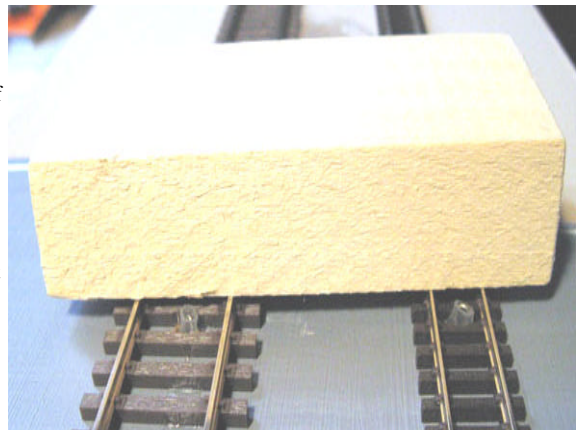
4. Magnets should clear the tops of the rails by about 1/32". If it turns out they aren't strong enough to activate the reed switch, additional magnets can be stacked onto the originals. The magnetic fields will add.

5. For timer operation, set the rotary switch for the desired time delay, which is four seconds per position. For prototypical operation if this switch is installed, it must be set to 0.

6. Mount the circuit board under the layout near the signal using the wood screws and nylon spacers provided.

7. Connect the cables for the signal, reed switch, and power. For prototypical operation, connect the INPUT to the OUTPUT of the next board down the track, as shown in the diagram on page 1. The last board connects its INPUT to a reed switch.

As with any electronic device, it's a good idea to use a surge suppressor on the 120 VAC power line.



## How it works

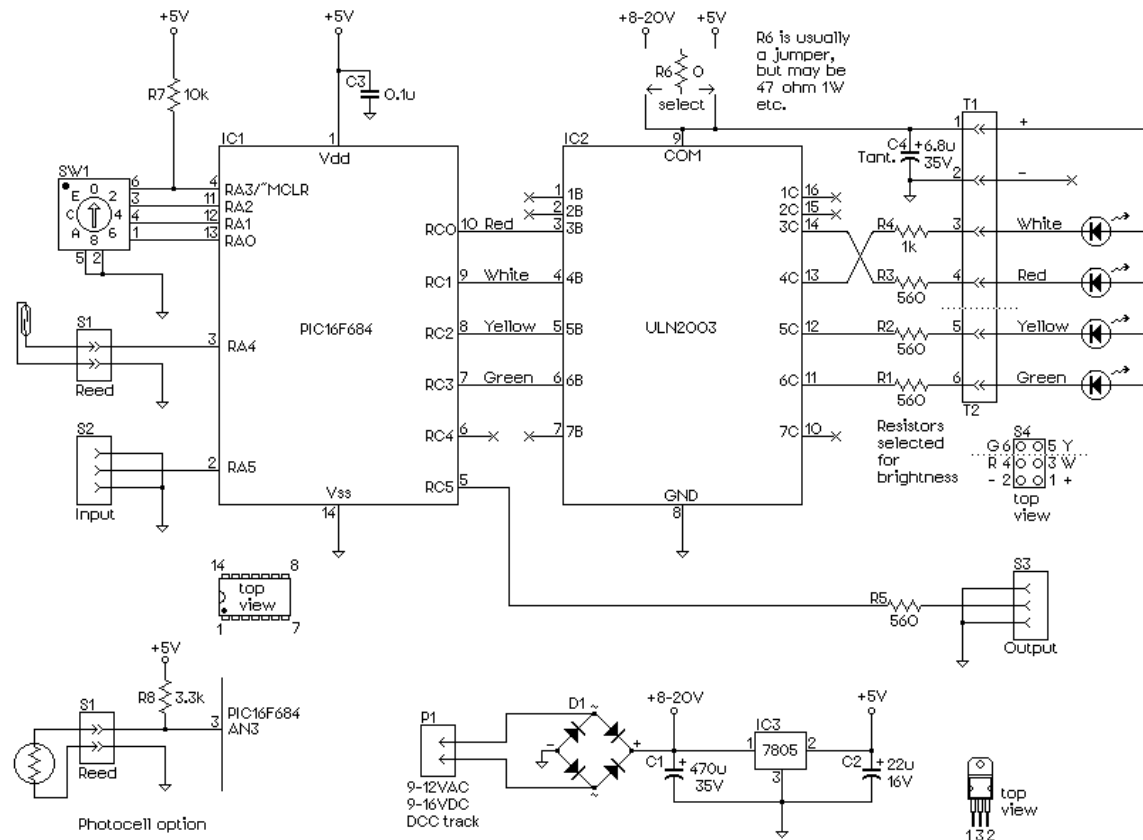
The software in the PIC microcontroller constantly scans for inputs 50 times per second. If a pulse is detected on the REED input, the output lines are changed to display a red signal.

Inputs from the rotary timer switch are read, and if it's not set on 0 then its value is multiplied by 200 to determine how many loops to execute before changing the outputs to yellow. This provides a delay of four seconds per switch position. If the switch is not installed, it reads as 0.

If the timer switch reads as 0 then prototypical operation is assumed, and the software waits for a pulse on the INPUT line before

changing the outputs to yellow. This input pulse comes from the next board down the track. When this next board's reed switch is pulsed a second time, by a passing caboose, it pulses its OUTPUT line.

For prototypical operation, blocks are separated by reed switches. When a train enters a block, the magnet on the engine turns the block's signal red. When the train exits the block, the magnet on the caboose causes a second pulse on the reed switch at the end of the block. The control board for this reed switch then sends back a pulse to the preceding control board that changes its signal to yellow. When the caboose clears the second block, the third signal will be red, the second board receives a pulse that turns its signal yellow, and the first board receives a second pulse that turns its signal green.



The schematic diagram shows the block signal controller with both the timer and prototypical options. Outputs are configured for a B&O signal. The PIC microcontroller is at the left, the driver transistor array is at the right, and the five volt power supply is at the bottom.

The input voltage ranges for the power supply are specified for unregulated sources; 9-15VAC or 9-20VDC can be used for regulated, or measured, sources. A photocell can replace the reed switch on the timer version when used with a variation of the software. Resistor R8 is attached to the underside of the board.

-Loren Blaney ([loren.blaney@gmail.com](mailto:loren.blaney@gmail.com))

```

;BlkSig.asm      10-Jun-2013      Loren Blaney      loren.blaney@gmail.com
;Controller for a model railroad block signal system with red, yellow, green,
; and white lights (aspects).
;Assemble with MPLAB IDE.
;
;REVISIONS:
;17-Jan-2013, Original sent to Doug Wright.
;17-Feb-2013, Fix white light and add demo mode.
;21-Feb-2013, Comment out demo mode, and passing caboose also turns signal red.
;10-Jun-2013, Production (PCB) version with timer switch; remove demo mode code.
;
;Reed switches are positioned between blocks.
; ##### 1 ##### 2 ##### 3 #####
;Magnets on the engine and caboose activate the reeds.

RADIX      DEC
ERRORLEVEL -224, -305, -302 ;TRIS, OPTION ok, ",F" is default, bank ok
LIST       ST=OFF           ;suppress symbol table listing

PROCESSOR  16F684
INCLUDE    "P16F684.INC"
__CONFIG__ INTRC_OSC_NOCLKOUT & _WDT_OFF & _MCLRE_OFF
    
```

```

;HARDWARE CONFIGURATION:
#define REEDIS PORTA,4 ;reed switch
#define INPUT PORTA,5
#define WHITE PORTC,1
#define RED PORTC,0
#define YELLOW PORTC,2
#define GREEN PORTC,3
#define OUTPUT PORTC,5

#define CF STATUS,0;bit 0 = carry flag
#define ZF STATUS,2;bit 2 = zero flag

CBLOCK 20H ;start of RAM
OUTCTR ;output pulse timer
DLYCTR0 ;delay counters
DLYCTR1
DLYCTR2
DLYCTR3
FLAGS ;array of 8 flag bits
ENDC

#define REEDWAS FLAGS,0 ;detects closure of reed switches (true low)
#define INPUTWAS FLAGS,1;detects negative transition of input signal
#define SAWENGINE FLAGS,2 ;engine detected

;-----
ORG 00H ;reset vector
GOTO RESET
ORG 04H ;interrupt vector

RESET MOV LW 20H ;clear bank 0 RAM from 20h to 7Fh
MOVWF FSR ;(this initializes variables)
RES00 CLRF INDF
INCF FSR
BTFSS FSR,7
GOTO RES00

;
MOV LW --O-GYWR
MOVWF 00101010B ;green and white on; others off (output high)
MOVWF PORTC

MOV LW 07h ;select digital I/O; comparators off
MOVWF CMCON0

BSF STATUS,RP0 ;bank 1 -----
CLRF ANSEL ;select digital I/O

MOV LW 11000000B ;set RC<5:0> as outputs
MOVWF TRISC
MOV LW 01111111B ;enable PORTA pullups
MOVWF OPTION_REG
BCF STATUS,RP0 ;bank 0 -----

COMF PORTA,W ;if no rotary switch, or switch set on "0"
ANDLW 0FH
BTFSS ZF ; then skip to prototypical mode
GOTO TIMERLOOP

;-----
;PROTOTYPICAL MODE

PROTOLOOP
;OUTPUT COUNTER
MOVF OUTCTR ;if OutCnt > 0 then
BTFSC ZF
GOTO OUT10
DECF OUTCTR ; OutCnt--
BTFSC ZF ; if OutCnt=0 then
BSF OUTPUT ; Output:= false (true low)
OUT10
;-----
;REED
BTFSS REEDIS ;if ReedIs=1 then reed is open (true low)
GOTO RD10
BSF REEDWAS ; ReedWas:= 1
GOTO RD20
RD10
BTFSS REEDWAS ;else if ReedWas=1 then closing edge
GOTO RD20
BCF REEDWAS ; ReedWas:= 0;

BTFSS SAWENGINE ;if SawEngine then caboose detected
GOTO RD15
BCF SAWENGINE ; SawEngine:= false
BCF OUTPUT ; Output:= true
MOV LW 2
MOVWF OUTCTR
GOTO RD17 ;(for safety, make sure signal is still red)

```

```

RD15          BSF      SAWENGINE      ;else
              BSF      RED            ; SawEngine:= true
RD17          BCF      YELLOW         ; Signal:= Red
              BCF      GREEN
              BCF      WHITE

RD20
; -----
;INPUT
      BTFSS     INPUT      ;if Input = 1 then
      GOTO     IN05
      BSF      INPUTWAS; Input Was:= 1
      GOTO     IN20

IN05
      BTFSS     INPUTWAS;else if InputWas=1 then negative edge
      GOTO     IN20
      BCF      INPUTWAS; InputWas:= 0;

      BTFSS     RED        ; if Signal = Red then
      GOTO     IN10
      BCF      RED        ; Signal:= Yellow
      BSF      YELLOW
      BCF      GREEN
      BSF      WHITE
      BCF      OUTPUT     ; Output:= true
      MOVLW    2
      MOVWF    OUTCTR
      GOTO     IN20

IN10
      BCF      RED        ; else (Signal must be yellow)
      BCF      YELLOW     ; Signal:= Green
      BSF      GREEN
      BSF      WHITE

IN20
      CALL     DELAY20MS ;for reed switch debounce
      GOTO     PROTOLOOP

;=====
;TIMER MODE

TIMERLOOP    ;-O-GYWR
GREEN0       MOVLW    00101010B ;green and white on; others off (output high)
             MOVWF    PORTC

GRN05        BTFSC    REEDIS     ;if ReedIs=0 then reed is closed (true low)
             GOTO     GRN05     ;wait for train

RED0         MOVLW    00100001B ;red on; others off (output high)
             MOVWF    PORTC

             COMF     PORTA,W    ;read rotary timer switch (true low signals)
             ANDLW   0FH        ;get timer bits
             BTFSC    ZF        ;no delay if 0
             GOTO     RED30
             MOVWF    DLYCTR3   ;number of 4-second periods to delay

RED05        MOVLW    200        ;200 * 20 ms = 4000 ms = 4 sec
             MOVWF    DLYCTR2

RED10        CALL     DELAY20MS
             BTFSS    REEDIS     ;(retriggerable timer) restart for caboose
             GOTO     RED0
             DECFSZ   DLYCTR2    ;loop for 4 seconds
             GOTO     RED10

             DECFSZ   DLYCTR3    ;next 4-second period
             GOTO     RED05

RED30
YELLOW0      MOVLW    00100110B ;yellow and white on; others off (output high)
             MOVWF    PORTC

             COMF     PORTA,W    ;read rotary timer switch (true low signals)
             ANDLW   0FH        ;get timer bits
             BTFSC    ZF        ;no delay if 0
             GOTO     YEL30
             MOVWF    DLYCTR3

YEL05        MOVLW    200        ;200 * 20 ms = 4000 ms = 4 sec
             MOVWF    DLYCTR2

YEL10        CALL     DELAY20MS
             BTFSS    REEDIS     ;(retriggerable timer) restart for caboose
             GOTO     RED0
             DECFSZ   DLYCTR2    ;loop for 4 seconds
             GOTO     YEL10

             DECFSZ   DLYCTR3    ;next 4-second period
             GOTO     YEL05

YEL30        GOTO     TIMERLOOP

```



```
;-----  
;Delay 20 milliseconds  
  
DELAY20MS  
    MOVLW    40          ;delay 40 * 500 = 20000 usec = 20 msec  
    MOVWF   DLYCTR1  
  
DLY10  MOVLW    125      ;delay 125*4 = 500 usec  
    MOVWF   DLYCTR0  
DLY20  NOP          ;1 usec  
    DECFSZ  DLYCTR0     ;1 usec  
    GOTO    DLY20      ;2 usec  
  
    DECFSZ  DLYCTR1  
    GOTO    DLY10  
    RETURN  
  
END
```