Introduction

EventTools is a small online package to provide web-based access to information for model railroading events. It was originally created for the X2011West NMRA convention, and continues to evolve. This document describes using EventTools for a small operating session event such as BayRails or ProRail.

EventTools stores a single copy of information, including:

- Layouts
- Operating Sessions
- Attendees and their operating session requests

From this, EventTools can create web pages, rosters, assign sessions, generate mailings, and in general help the committee do their jobs.

EventTools is installed onto the event's web site. It then provides a series of screens for entering and editing information, and utilities that the even's webmaster can use to present information on the events' web site.

When you first access an EventTools page, you may be asked to identify yourself. Enter your email address (if in doubt, ask the webmaster); you can leave the password field blank for now.

The main page presents options for entering, editing and viewing each type of information:

X2011West Event Tools

Provides access to the X2011West tour and clinic tools.

	General Tours	Layout Tours	Other Events	Layouts	Clinics	Op Sessions
Enter/Change Content	Enter/Change	Enter/Change	Enter/Change	Enter/Change	Enter/Change	Enter/Change
Other Edits		Add Layouts To Tour	Add or remove tags	Quick Entry	Add or remove tags	Enter/Change User Requests
Review Content	List	List	List	List	List	
Index Example	Index	Index	Index	Index	Index	Index
Format Example	Formatted View	Formatted View	Formatted View	Formatted View	Formatted View	
X2011west Test Pages	X2011west Table X2011west Index	X2011west Table X2011west Index	X2011west Table X2011west Index	X2011west Table X2011west Index	X2011west Table X2011west Index	User request
Other Displays	Interactive General/Proto Tour Calendar	Tour Maps (put tour number in URL) Interactive Layout Tour Calendar	Misc Events Grouped by Location Interactive Misc Events Calendar		Clinics Grouped by Location Interactive Clinics Calendar	Request Summary Operating Layout Table

General Displays	Index Advanced Section Tours All Advanced Section Tours Download Events Calendar Full Interactive Calendar

For more information on using EventTools, please see the most recent draft of the EventTools User Guide.

For small operating-session events, probably only the "Layouts" and "Op Session" sections will appear.

Intended Workflow

- Gather information
- Enter information

- Review and approve listings
- Display to user
- Update as needed

You enter and update (edit) entries on different web pages for each type. There's an entry/edit page for for layouts, another for operating sessions on those layouts, etc. Information can be entered and accumulated using those until it's ready for display, and then marked to be presented to the user.

Each entry can be marked with a status value chosen from:

Internal Name	Shown to User
Unknown	Proposed
Incomplete, Some Data Entered	Proposed
Waiting Approval	Under Construction
Approved: Under Construction	Under Construction
Approved: (on sale)	(shows link to on-line store entry
Sold Out	Sold Out
Cancelled	Cancelled

(These are typical values; you can provide your own through the index page.) As you enter information for a layout or operating session, you also update the status as appropriate. EventTools is be configured to only who entries with a certain status and above (but see note about layouts below). Normally, “Under Construction” & better are shown by default.

Note: Both layouts and operating sessions have a status field. If you set a layout or session so that it's visible, it will be shown. In a perfect world, they would be set consistently: When the operating session is approved, the layouts would be visible.

Entering Information into EventTools

Committees typically have various people responsible for different aspects of the planning. They generate information that needs to be entered into EventTools so that it can do its job. That can be done as a batch process, where spreadsheets or other documents in well-defined formats are inserted directly into the EventTools database. This makes sense for large, already-existing documents. There is no need to create those documents for import, however, because there are web pages that allow you to directly enter and change information.

The usual process is to:

- Enter the layouts
- Define the operating sessions for those layouts
- Create pages that show that information to the attendees and allow them to sign up
- Process the session requests and make assignments

What follows is a short tutorial on those.

Adding a Layout

The process for adding a layout is very similar to that for adding a layout tour (see main EventTools manual for now; this will be included here later), except that there are a lot more information fields. You can record the layout address to automatically generate tour maps and bus mileage calculations. You can also record all of the information on the OPSIG questionnaire for operating-session layouts, which saves work when organizing those sessions.

The screens for adding, editing and displaying fill a separate column on the EventTools index page. The top link is to the main "Enter/Change" screen, which provides access to all the information fields. Just below that is the "Quick Entry" link, which consists of just the most common fields to make it easy to enter initial information quickly.

A few fields might require more explanation:

"Access": By default, EventTools presents a layout's handicapped accessibility using a 6 point code:

- Handicapped Hostile
- Several steps and/or duck-under(s)
- Average house (1-2 steps)
- No hazards
- Special adaptations for the handicapped
- Unknown/not entered

For the access item, you just pick one of those.

"Short Description": A one-line description that appears in various summaries, in the tour listings, etc.

"Long Description": This can be much larger. Special formatting, including URLs, can be done using HTML tags, but in general you don't have to worry about this. Just enter the text, it will look OK.

"Owner URL": If the owner has provided a URL for a web page describing their layout, it should be entered here starting with the http:// prefix.

"Local URL": This is a URL for a specific convention web page that describes the layout, if one exists. In general, you can leave this blank and let the webmaster fill it out.

For items like scale, gauge, scenery completion fraction, etc, EventTools can be configured to either allow you to enter free-form text, or to only permit you to select from specific values. Selecting between these two approaches is done on a variable-by-variable basis when EventTools is installed. Consult the Administration Manual for more information on this. If EventTools has been configured to only allow specific values, you can add/edit/delete the acceptable values in the "Constraints" section of the index page.

Editing Layout Information

This is very similar to the process for editing a layout tour described earlier. Note that you can search on any of the fields to find the layout you want to edit, including the description. The starting URL is on the index page as “Enter/Change” in the “Layouts” column.

Op Sessions

Operation sessions are built on top of the layout information that's separately stored in EventTools. See the preceding sections for instructions on how to enter layout information. Note that modelers interesting in operating are often interested in the optional fields on realism, control systems, card forwarding methods, scheduling, etc, so operating layouts should probably have more complete information than ones that are just included in layout tours.

Once the operating layouts have been defined, you can add operating session information to them. To do that, use the edit/change operating session page, linked from the upper right of the index page:

(v)	Layout	Location	Distance	Travel Time	Presenting Time	Start date/time	End date/time	Slots	Status	Note	2nd Layout	3rd Layout	4th Layout
X	Sorted By: Layout ascending, Start date/time ascending												
⦿	0							0	Unknown		0	0	0
○	Adams (D&RGW Durlin Branch)	Advance Section	21 miles	25 minutes	Friday July 1 1900	2011-07-01 19:00:00	2011-07-01 23:00:00	8	Waiting Approval		0	0	0
○	Adams (D&RGW Durlin Branch)	Advance Section	21 miles	25 minutes	Sunday July 3 0930	2011-07-03 09:30:00	2011-07-04 00:00:00	8	Waiting Approval		0	0	0
○	Bowdidge (SP Vasona Branch)	Advance Section	22 miles	28 minutes	Friday July 1 1900	2011-07-01 19:00:00	2011-07-01 23:00:00	4	Incomplete, Some Data Entered		0	0	0
○	Bowdidge (SP Vasona Branch)	Advance Section	22 miles	28 minutes	Sunday July 3 0930	2011-07-03 09:30:00	2011-07-04 14:00:00	4	Incomplete, Some Data Entered		0	0	0

Each line represents an operating session. The fields are:

Location: Used for grouping layouts. Typically “Advance Section”, “North Bay”, “Sacramento” or similar, this label appears on some of the index pages.

Distance and Travel Time: Presented in the operating session listings so attendees can plan how much time to allow to get to the session.

Presenting Time: In addition to the precise start and stop times, the operating session organizers originally wanted to generate their own descriptions of layout times so they could say things like “Sometime Thursday” instead of a precise time. This field is displayed where-ever the start time is displayed to the user.

Start Time and End Time: If provided, these will be used to mark operating sessions in the general and attendee-specific calendars.

Slots: Number of people who can attend. Not used initially during the request phase, but used as part of assigning people to requested layouts.

Status: The same status codes as for layouts and layout tours are available for operating sessions. See the first section above for more information on these.

Note: Free form, for use as desired. Not visible to the attendees.

2nd Layout, 3rd Layout, 4th Layout: An op session can be a two-fer, three-fer, four-fer with multiple layouts. These can either be sequential (people operate at one then another) or in parallel (the group of attendees splits across the layouts and operates them at the same time).

To change an operating session, select its radio box and click “Change”. You'll get a new screen where the entry can be changed. Layouts are selected from drop-down boxes. The contents of those are in alphabetical order by layout owner last name. Once the box has been selected by tabbing or with the mouse, type a few characters of the name to go directly to a layout. Once the entry has been updated as you'd like, click “Save” to save your changes and go back to the index.

Op Session Requests

In general, users enter their op session requests via a custom form (see below). You can view, change, add or delete those requests via the “Enter/Change User Request” entry in the Op Session column of the index. That leads to a screen that looks like:

v	Your email address	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	5th priority	6th priority	7th priority	8th priority	Any session OK, not just priorities?	Number of sessions you'd like	Any comments?
⦿	harvego@whidbey.net	Friday July 8 1800 Kent Williams Oregon, Washington Navigation & Railway	2011-07-05 18:00:00 Dave Houston Southern Pacific Rocklin Sub	2011-07-07 18:30:00 Phil Gulley Union Pacific & Summit County RR	2011-07-04 09:30:00 David Clemens Idaho-Montana Railway & Navigation Co					N	4	Carpooling with Al Frasch and Rich Thom. Please assign us to the same op sessions.
○	bdmorden@sbceo.org	Monday July 4 0930 David Clemens Idaho-Montana Railway & Navigation Co	2011-07-04 13:30:00 Steve Gust Clay & Mud Point							Y	1	
○	n1stars@xs4all.nl	Monday July 4 1800 Kent Williams Oregon, Washington Navigation & Railway								N	1	I'm coming together with my brother Hans (hans@n-stars.com) and Kent is a friend of us. We'll be at the Portola museum earlier that day (not by bus but on our own)

There are “Add”, “View”, “Change”, “Copy”, “Delete” and navigation buttons at the bottom of the screen. To change an entry, for example, select it with the radio button on its left side, and click “Change”. That will take you to a screen like:

Edit Operating Session Requests

Your email address	peter@borcherds.com
1st priority	Thursday July 7 1800 Bill Kaufman State Belt RR
2nd priority	2011-07-06 18:00:00 Jim Providenza Santa Cruz Northern
3rd priority	2011-07-08 10:00:00 Sacramento Modular Sacramento Central
4th priority	2011-07-08 13:00:00 Sacramento Modular Sacramento Central
5th priority	2011-07-10 10:00:00 Sacramento Modular Sacramento Central
6th priority	
7th priority	
8th priority	
Any session OK, not just priorities?	Y
Number of sessions you'd like	5
Any comments?	New to operations, so not experienced with disciplined tone

Save Apply Cancel

You change whatever information you'd like, and then click "Save", or click "Cancel" to go back without making any changes.

Making a Registration Form

You probably don't want to enter the attendee's information and op session requests manually. You can create a web page on your web site that allows them to do this for themselves.

The "sample_ops_reg_form.php" file is a starting point for this. There are many ways to do it, but that page shows one that works reasonably well. It's divided into several parts to make it easier to customize. Note that it's appearance is incredibly basic, so you should embed it in a page presentation structure that makes it look like all your other pages.

- Create the form
  - Create the part that gathers the user name, etc
  - Create the part that asks optional questions
  - Create the part that asks for op session preferences
- Process the form on return
  - Parse the returned information
  - Enter it into EventTools
  - If desired, email it to somebody
  - If desired, add it to a sequential file

Assigning Attendees to Op Sessions

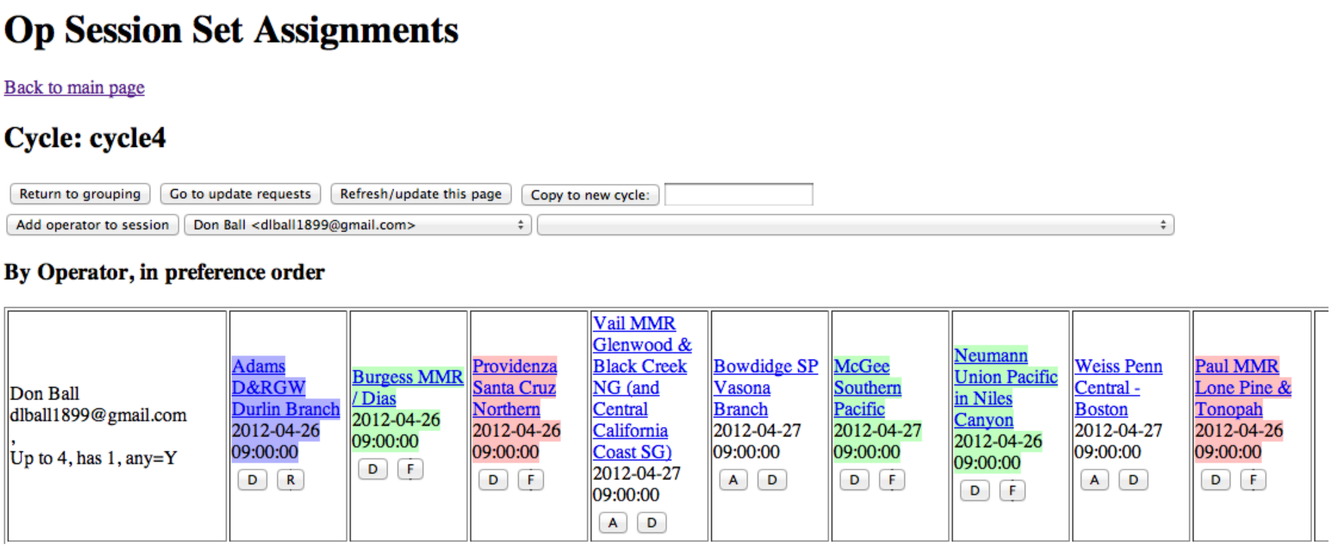
Once you have the attendee's information, there's a two-part process for assigning them to sessions.

First, you group attendee's together into groups that will be assigned together. This allows you to handle "Traveling with Bill, please assign us to same layout" requests. Grouping should only be done with identical requests. The "^" indicates requests that match. (If the requests don't ask for the same layout, who do you send them to?)

The second step is the actual assignment, which can be done automatically or manually.

You can have several shots at doing the assignment, called "cycles". This lets you try different ways of doing it, only using the one you like. Cycles have names, which can be whatever you'd like.

Top of window:



Navigation links and buttons. "Copy to new cycle" lets you make a duplicate of the current assignments into a new named cycle, and continue with that new one.

Next is a table of requests for a given operator. The requested layouts are listed in order. The color means:

- White background – requested, not assigned, but could be assigned.
- Blue background – assigned
- Light red background – can't be assigned due to a current conflict, e.g. another assignment at the same time.
- Dark red background – manually disabled, can't be automatically assigned
- Green background – Can't be assigned because the layout is full. This is green, instead of red, because it might become available if somebody else's assignment is changed.

The buttons do things. Note that only some possibilities apply.

- A – Assign this person to this session
- D – Disable the request: Not assigned, and won't be selected by any automatic assignment.
- R – Release – drop a current assignment
- F – Force assignment to the session, even if the session is full or in a conflict.

The label at the left shows how many operating sessions the user wants; how many they have assigned now; and whether they'll take anything or just the ones they requested.

Lower in the page is a listing by operating session:

By Session

Adams D&RGW Durlin Branch 2012-04-26 09:00:00 2/23/8 P	Don Ball dlball1899@gmail.com , [Pri: 1] D R	Carl Kempkes carl.kempkes@valmont.com , [Pri: 1] D R	Mike Chandler mikado1@telus.net , [Pri: 2] D F	Andrew Dodge orocity@hotmail.com , [Pri: 2] D F	Jim Lofland jlof811@att.net , [Pri: 2] D F
Bowdidge SP Vasona Branch 2012-04-27 09:00:00 1/18/4 P	James Williams james.williams@mcsi.net , [Pri: 1] D R	Gary Gelzer GNCrailway@cox.net , [Pri: 3] A D	Jason Hill hilljason@yahoo.com , [Pri: 3] A D	Keith Jordan ckjordan@kc.rr.com , [Pri: 3] D F	Bob Willer RHWiller@kc.rr.com , [Pri: 3] A D
Burgess MMR / Dias 2012-04-26 09:00:00 4/0/4	John Brennan jfb99@earthlink.net , [Pri: 1] D R	Bill Darnaby wdarnaby@att.net , [Pri: 1] D R	Andrew Dodge orocity@hotmail.com , [Pri: 1] D R	Jason Hill hilljason@yahoo.com , [Pri: 1] D R	Steve King sking8887@verizon.net , [Pri: 1] D F
Central Club					

The color coding and buttons are the same, with the addition of the “P” button. The “P” button assigns requests with the next-highest priority to the session. For example, if first and second priorities have been assigned, and there are more spaces in a particular session, “P” will assign anybody who gave 3rd priority to this session.

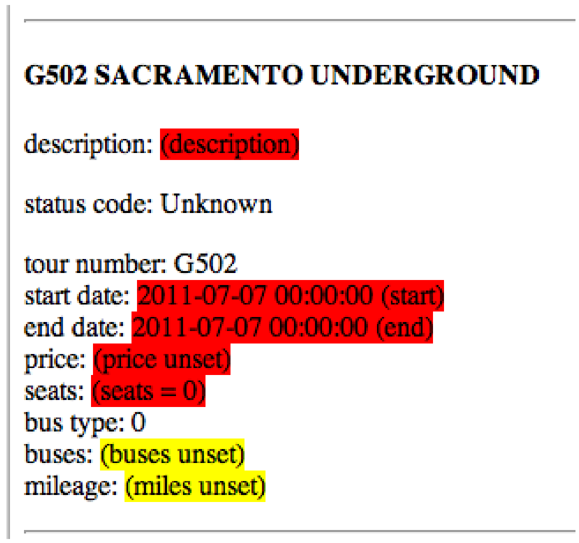
The number at the left is the number of layouts assigned, the number of people still to be assigned (not counting those with conflicts) and the number of spaces remaining.

At the bottom is a “fill best priority N” button which tries to do the best it can to assign people to their Nth priority spot. This starts out as 1, but goes to a higher priority value (e.g. 2, 3) as assignments are made and the lower values are no longer relevant.

Once you start making assignments, the list of registrants and requests are frozen. Later registrants won't appear until you manually “update requests”. This is done so that you can make assignments for people who met the deadline, then later update to include late registrants and assign them. To update, click the “Go to update requests” button. This will give you a new page with all the differences that the program knows about, and buttons to include them. First it will list new & deleted users, with buttons to add and remove them. Then it will list all the specific requests that attendees have changed or added. Click the buttons to make the changes (in the current cycle), and then go back to the assignment page to make any needed assignments. New attendees will have to assignments made on their requests, and deleted attendees will have made their slots available again.

Reviewing and Approving Listings

Once information has been entered, you review it using the “Review Content” or “Listing” pages on the main page. By default, these display all listings regardless of status, highlighting missing information. Typical entries for general tours look like:



And a layout entry with missing information looks like:

Antioch (last name)

layout name: Black Diamond Lines
short desc: (short desc)
long desc: (long desc)

status code: Unknown
Error: Unapproved layout visible on approved tour

scale: (scale)
prototype: (proto)
era: (era)
scenery: (scenery)
size: (size)
mainline length: (main len)
plan type: (plan type)
ops scheme: (ops scheme)
control: (control)
accessibility: (6) Unknown/not entered
wheelchair access: N
duckunder entry: N
owner url:
first name: Antioch
last name: (last name)
phone: (phone)

High-priority missing information or errors are highlighted in red. Optional, but desirable, missing information and possible future errors are highlighted in yellow. The status code is not colored, because any value is considered correct.

There are also “formatted” displays available from the main page. These display the information using a simplified version of the format provided for on the main convention web pages. These let you easily get a quick view of what the user will see.

Missing information can be added using the same edit pages described previously. Once the information is OK, use the add/edit page to set the entry's status high enough that it will display on the main convention pages.

Displaying Information to the User

Generally, EventTools users don't have to worry about this step. Display on the main web site is automatic once the status has been set to a suitable value.

The on-line store (if used) has to be updated manually, and the various printed documents such as the paper order packet are only updated periodically. It's important that people making changes that will effect those, for example changes to prices or schedules, stay in touch with the rest of the organizers.

Updating as Needed

If you update something, the change on the web site is immediate. For example, a change to a description will appear the next time the user displays the page containing it.

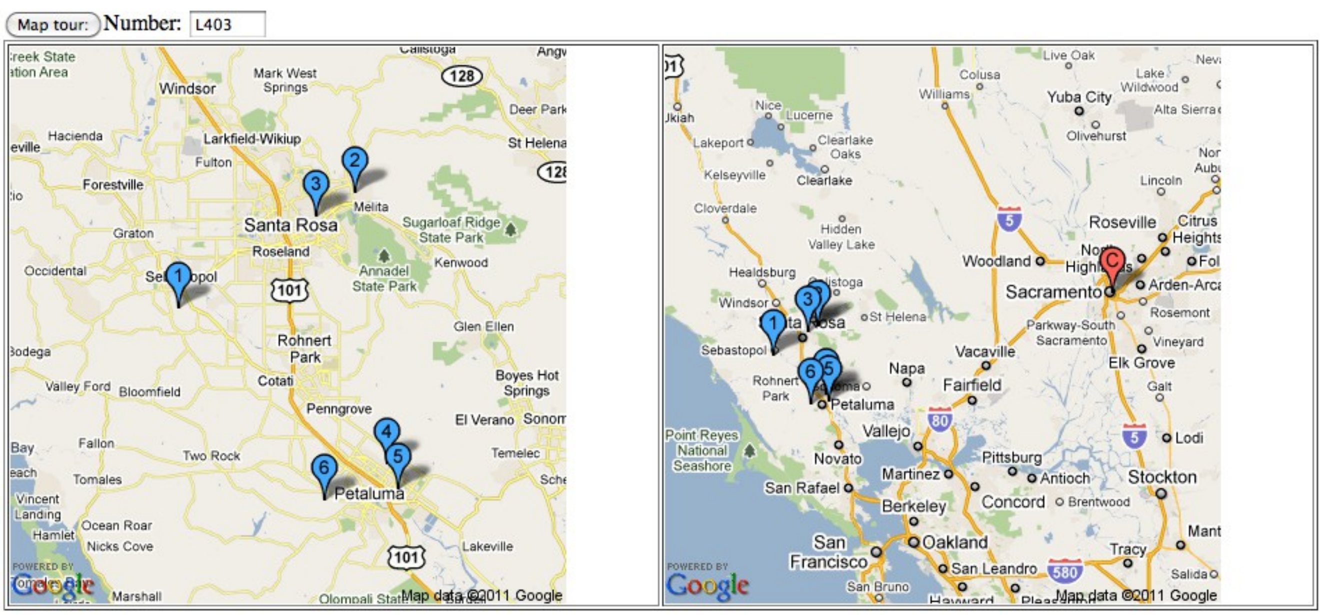
As discussed in the previous section, though, the on-line store and printed materials are updated less often. Please notify the appropriate convention committee members when you want those updated.

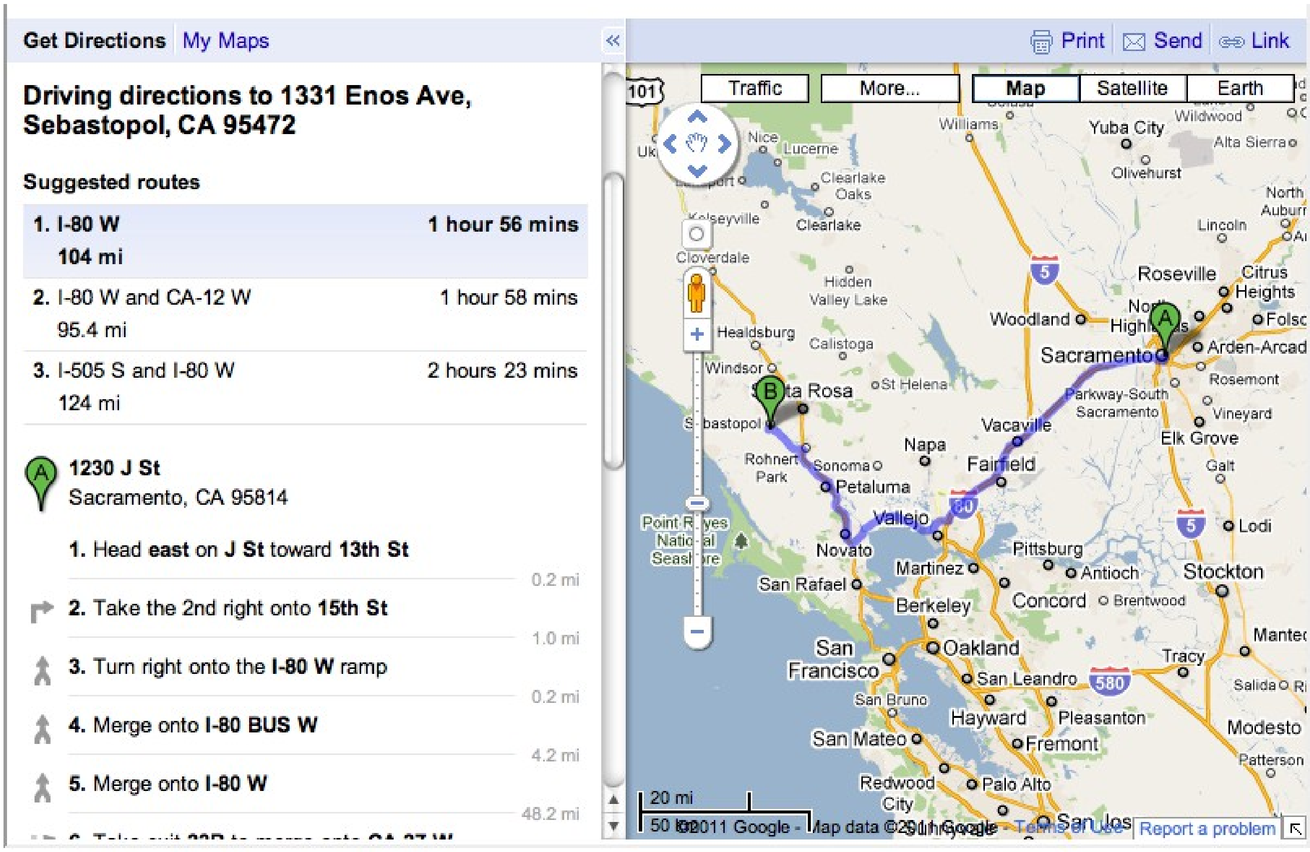
Additional Capabilities

Once EventTools has the data, it can help you do all sorts of things with it. By entering data early, even partial data, you can enlist the help of others to improve the data, check it, etc.

Mapping

For example, it can draw maps of the locations of layouts on a layout tour, show distances and directions between the layouts, and generally help plan the tour time and cost:





The Google maps can even tell you when you've mistyped the address, or have accidentally put it in the wrong town.

Tours can be displayed by day and time in a way that makes it easy to tell where buses can be shared, and mileage calculations can be done to ensure that limits are not exceeded.

Distributing the Editing Task

Because everybody is inherently working off the same set of data, you can share out the work as needed without worrying about inconsistent data. Access can also be restricted in whatever way, with some people only being able to enter/edit certain kinds of data or only certain entries.

- Once you have layout owner email addresses entered, you can give them access to update and improve their own layout entry. They can fill in the detailed fields so that you don't have to worry about all that data. They can be asked to improve the entry until they're happy with it and approve it, removing the need to spend time going back and forth.
- Clinicians can be given access to update their clinic descriptions and attached URLs, without giving them the ability to change the schedule.