

Review - Transport Tycoon (DOS, 1994)

Microprose is certainly no stranger to quality strategy games. The company's history is so cluttered with top-notch strategy titles it's hard to single one out from the masses. Transport Tycoon is the latest feather in Microprose's cap. Although Transport Tycoon is as high-quality a game as we've come to expect from Microprose, it nevertheless takes the company into new territory.

Transport Tycoon is a game of business, economics, expansion, and cut-throat rivalry, brought to us by designer Chris Sawyer. You start off with no possessions save for a mountain of debt, and from there you must build a transportation empire. The randomly-generated world you play in is very large, and towns and industries are often separated by great distance, which is where you come in. People want to go places, and they have stuff they want to send places. By making the right decisions about what services will be most profitable and where, and by getting there first, you can grow from a tiny company into a multi-million dollar corporation lesser men can only envy. Or you can crash and burn and spend the rest of your life drinking Wild Irish Rose out of a paper bag. No one said it was gonna be easy.

The game is played from an isometric 3D viewpoint, much like you'll find in SimCity 2000 or Populous. Transport Tycoon features 640x480 SVGA graphics, and the game's images are crisp, colorful, and extremely attractive. But the SVGA resolution isn't just for show. You'll need every bit of space on the screen to keep up with all that's happening in this game. Your main interface is an icon bar across the top of the screen. Clicking on these icons, and certain objects within the game as well, opens information windows on the screen. These windows can be closed, moved around, and sometimes even resized. If you've ever used Microsoft Windows (and you're using it right now), you should have no trouble adapting to Transport Tycoon's interface.

At the start of the game the towns in the game world will be fairly small. They will grow and respond to your business. Your first step, after naming your company, is to start up a small transport operation, usually a couple of bus terminals. To do this, you use the overhead map to find the biggest towns, then center your view on one and zoom in. Your first order of business is to build a depot, which will allow you to build and repair road vehicles. Then you create two bus terminals, or more if the town is big enough; when you select a building to create a highlight grid is activated, which shows the building's prospective site in white and its effective area in blue, allowing you to position your terminals accurately to cover the entire town. Once you have two or three terminals, you build a vehicle, a bus in this case, which automatically opens a window for that vehicle. Using this window, you set the vehicle's destinations, and send it out. Bus lines are the easiest and least expensive transportation you can create, so they're understandably the least profitable as well.

The example of creating a bus line, while simple, is the basic method for all transport creation in the game. Other more expensive and profitable transportation routes are included, including trucks and other road vehicles, trains, ships, and airplanes. You can even get to the point where you can build monorails and other futuristic methods of transport, if your company can keep its head above water long enough. With the non-bus transport methods you'll have another factor to consider – cargo. The types of cargo a station will accept depends on its placement in the town. Whether we're talking about a train station, a truck loading bay, or an airport, you'll make more money if you can provide transport for many different kinds of cargo.

Transport Tycoon has an open-ended feel to it, much like SimCity. There's no preset starting point, and no specific goal you accomplish to end the game. To give the game an added sense of direction the designers have included subsidies. These are special offers made by local authorities to interest transport companies in providing a specified service, such as getting oil from a well to a distant oil refinery or providing passenger transport between two specific cities. These subsidies pay additional profits for the first year to the first company to provide the service, thus providing you with mini goals within the game. Just remember that these subsidies will undoubtedly attract the greedy interest of your rivals as well, so you'll have to move fast.

Like Railroad Tycoon and the SimCity games, Transport Tycoon is utterly addictive. As soon as your first bus line is operational you see dozens of other opportunities to make even more money, and you're sucked in thoroughly from that point on. I have forgone food and sleep to play Transport Tycoon, and I doubt very much that I'm alone in my obsession. The only fault I can find with the game stems directly from its amazing scope. You wind up doing so much in this game that you'll find yourself losing track of the transport systems you created early on in the game. Let's face it: when you've got 15 railroads to keep track of, six airports to direct, and a major expansion of your nautical service in the works, that little four terminal cross-town bus service gets lost in the shuffle. The only part of Transport Tycoon that annoyed me at all is that there seems to be a cap on the number of transport services allowable in the game. In one long-running game I built up, in which I managed to peacefully co-exist with two rival companies while still making more money than I knew what to do with I found myself unable to build anything anywhere, even in small towns that hadn't attracted any transport services yet. That irritated me, but I suppose it's my own fault for being such a nice guy and not running the other companies out of business.

Transport Tycoon is another fantastic strategy game from Microprose. If you've ever played Railroad Tycoon or SimCity 2000 you should fall in love with TT instantly. If you've never played those games (Shame on you, silly person!) Transport Tycoon may well make a convert out of you. It's a very large game (in scope, not hard drive real estate) which boasts beautiful graphics, a near-perfect interface, and gameplay addictive enough to make you lose your job and family. Normally I don't have any interest in business, especially the transport business, but TT got me interested in its subject matter, truly the mark of a superior game.

[Play the demo for this game directly in your browser](#)

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