String Railway

A railroad game for five persons, with tracks that total 9 meters, packed in a box of just under 11 x 11 x 5 centimeters!? This feat can only be accomplished in the land of cramped opportunities: Japan. The track material consists of strings, 30 cm or 60 cm long. The playing area is also marked with a string, bordering the terrain in which the railroad routes are to be generated. Somewhere in the middle, there is also a mountain rising and a river meandering, "strung" as well, of course. What is located where, whether the river rises from inside the mountain or the plains and whether it flows out of the playing area or trickles away – all this is left to the players. If there is a game with an infinitely variable set-up, then it is this one. Many a player may be misled by the mini-box, but the surface area required is as large as in Railroad Tycoon.

The players' home stations are located at the outer edges, about the same distance from one another. Each player runs his own company. The requirements are really simple: On your turn, you draw a station tile from the face-down pile, put it in the playing area and build a railroad track, i. e., you lay out a string. This string must connect two stations in such a way that both ends of the string lie on tiles. How the course between these two ends runs is left to you. If possible, you try to connect other stations, since this gives you points. However, there are limits to an uncontrolled extension of the railroad line.

The stations that are revealed from the pile are of very different kinds. There are central stations, town stations, countryside stations, junction stations, local stations and other types. Most of them can only accept a limited number of railroad


lines, some even only one; but in this case, you are allowed to build another station. Whenever a station is connected to a line for the first time, it generates victory points – that don't always go (only) to the owner of the line, but sometimes also to the developer of the station. But sometimes, this developer loses victory points – when other companies connect, since the station then loses its exclusivity. Clear symbols on the tiles make sure that you quickly overlook the very differentiated distribution of points.

The more the game proceeds the more difficult the building of the railroad line becomes; the terrain fills quickly with tracks and stations. All the more so if the architect of the playing area in the beginning has not laid out a rectangular area but an irregular and angled one (beginners are definitely advised against doing so). You may traverse other players' lines, cross the river, build into and out of the

mountain – but each crossing of a string gives you a minus point and thus takes away from your point account. It should also be pointed out that String Railway requires some tolerance. Especially in the end phase, after a lot has been built, it can happen that a tile or a string gets out of place when a player tries out ways in which he could place his next track in the most profitable way.

After only five rounds, the game is over – and has whetted your appetite for playing this game again. Unfortunately, String Railway is currently out of print, even in Japan. If there is another edition, get hold of a copy immediately!

KMW/sbw
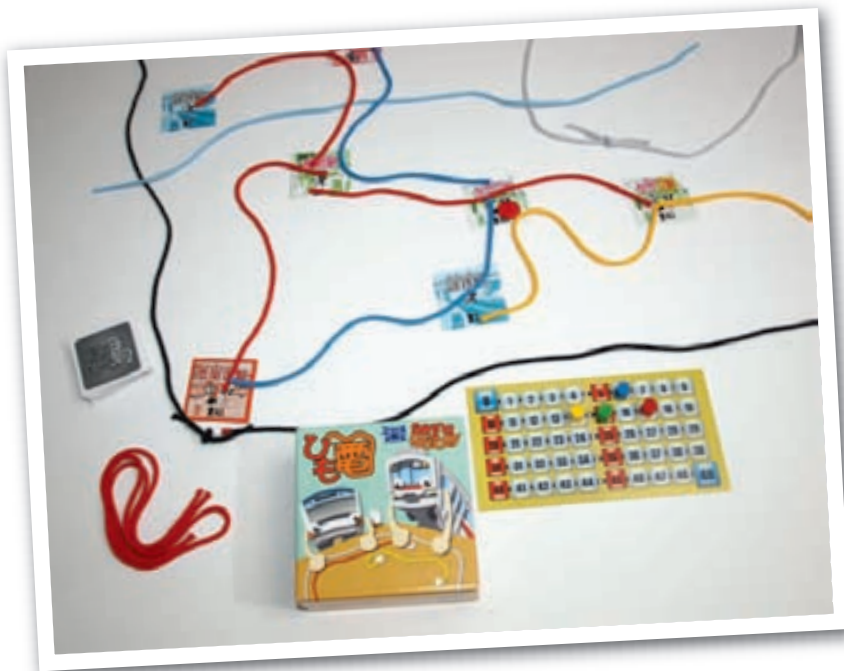
String Railway (Okazu Brand) by Hisashi Hayashi; for 2–5 players, about 8 and up; duration: about 30 minutes; price: about 2.400 ¥.