

Testimony in Opposition to LB 317

Transportation and Telecommunications Committee Submitted on Behalf of ProRail Nebraska February 24, 2015

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. Chairman Smith and members of this committee, I am here representing a group called ProRail Nebraska. This non-profit advocacy group focuses on increased passenger rail services as well as other public transportation options within the state.

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) brings together state leaders from 12 states in the Midwest and the Plains regions to advocate for passenger rail improvements. This organization has been instrumental in moving states forward for new or expanded passenger rail options. The planning and development of passenger rail infrastructure in the Plains will occur with or without Nebraska's participation. ProRail Nebraska suggests that it would be foolish for our state to deny itself the opportunity to participate in this planning.

In October, 2014, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) invited groups of states to submit Statements of Interest and Qualifications (SOI) for participating in an FRA-led regional rail planning process. The SOI's received will assist the FRA in determining which region(s) to potentially study. In November, the MIPRC submitted an SOI on behalf of the Midwestern states including Nebraska for participation in an FRA-led regional rail planning process.

Planning regionally facilitates the integration of rail projects with other transportation modes; promotes greater involvement by stakeholders; and identifies priorities for limited Federal funding. The FRA is seeking to advance practices for regional rail planning and to further the development of regional plans.

The MIPRC-led SOI proposes both long-term planning and facilitating the coordination of ongoing regional planning, oversight, and political and educational efforts. The proposal included a process that will update the work outlined in the 2004 Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) plan. The process would encompass additional states, new and potential routes, rail work already completed in the states, and studies undertaken by various groups in the Midwest. It would include a wide variety of cooperating entities – states, cities, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, freight railroads, Amtrak and institutions of higher education.

The FRA's planning process would build on the work that Midwestern and Plains states have accomplished through coordination over the past 20 years. It is expected that corridor projects be identified and prioritized and a process for their on-going advancement will be developed. This process will include preliminary planning to environmental review to construction. Results from the multistate planning effort will give guidance to the National Rail Plan. It is critically important that Nebraska be a part of this planning process. Otherwise our state will not be at the table to provide input that represents the best interests of the state.

Thank You.

Matthew Roque
900 S 36th St. Lincoln, NE 68510
785.280.3124