

Testimony in Support of LB 644

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

First of all, thank you Senators Nordquist, Morfeld, and Pansing Brooks for introducing LB 644. My appreciation is also extended to Senator Smith and this committee for the work they are doing on behalf of the citizens of Nebraska.

I am here today 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.

As a group focused on rail issues, we participated in and have studied the Nebraska Transit Corridors Study completed for the Nebraska Transit and Rail Advisory Council in 2003. Although a good document, it did contain several flaws that have continued to impact transportation planning to this day.

One of the major flaws is its lack of any medium and long-range analysis or recommendations. The study simply analyzed the feasibility of developing commuter rail or bus systems by the year 2010. In addition to the limitations of the 2003 study imposed by the short term planning framework, the study did not undertake any in-depth origin and destination analysis. Commuting by University of Nebraska undergraduate and graduate students, for example was not considered, nor was an analysis of non-work related demand considered. Based on the limited research undertaken for the study, the report concluded that it was probably not feasible to initiate rail or bus commuter service by 2010.

Both the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan areas have experienced significant growth since 2003 and this same rate of growth is expected for the next 20 to 30 years. Studies conducted by the Joslyn Castle Institute, The Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission, The Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance, The Lincoln-Lancaster Planning Commission and the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency among others, have projected considerable population growth and development activity within the Lincoln Omaha corridor. The construction of additional traffic lanes on I-80 in the corridor between Lincoln and Omaha demonstrate the importance the state places on serving the transportation needs of this growing population.

ProRail Nebraska implores our state to adequately prepare for the future transportation needs of its citizens in Lincoln, Omaha, and the areas in between. We believe the provisions of LB 644 offer the state a timely opportunity to examine alternatives for developing successful and cost effective transportation solutions for the future. ProRail Nebraska recommends LB 644 be used by the state to begin an incremental transportation planning and development strategy to take advantage of opportunities that can be implemented in the short term which will result in significant cost savings in the future. In order to accomplish these objectives, we suggest detailed analyses and projections be conducted for a planning period extending 20 years or more into the future through a revitalized Nebraska Transit and Rail Advisory Council.

Thank You.

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