



ProRail Nebraska NEWS

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ProRail Nebraska, Inc.
3915 Apple St.
Lincoln, NE 68503

Volume X

April 2003

Annual Meeting in Fremont May 3

The Annual Meeting will be held at the Fremont and Elkhorn Valley Railroad (FEVR) depot in Fremont, Nebraska. ProRail Nebraska members will have the opportunity to take a short train ride to Nickerson and back after the meeting. Prior to the general meeting, a **Board of Directors Meeting** will be held from **9:00 – 10:00 AM**. Members are welcome to sit in at this meeting, especially if they have a certain item to present to the board.

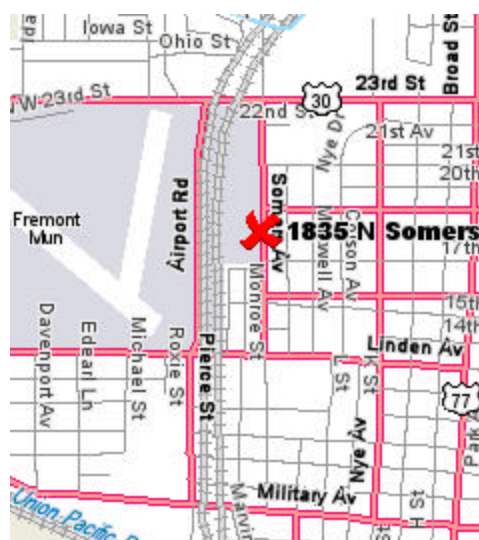
Registration with donuts, coffee, and orange juice will begin at **10:00 AM** and the **General Meeting** will convene at **10:30 AM**. Plans for lunch are to carpool to the USA Steak Buffet. The meeting will conclude at **3:00 PM** and the **train ride** will depart at **3:15 PM** and return at about **4:45 PM**. Cost for the meeting is \$5, train ride is \$15, and lunch is an individual additional cost. **Pre-registration is required; please use the enclosed form.**

Vice President **Gary Emenitove** will preside over the meeting and a guest with the FEVR will speak about the organization. Agenda items include reports from all directors, reports on Amtrak status, N-TRAC/Commuter Rail status, Midwest Regional Rail, and NARP. For those of you who missed the Denver NARP Region 10 and/or Gomaco Trolley meetings, videos will be shown that were shown at those meetings. This will also be your chance to see the new ProRail Nebraska brochure and District 1 Director Richard Schmeling will present the new T-Shirt and Golf Shirt, ready to buy and/or order.

Most importantly, we will be holding elections for the Board of Directors offices of President, Treasurer, District 1 Director (Lincoln area), and District 3 Director (western Nebraska north of the Platte River). ProRail Nebraska members in good standing are hereby invited to contact any of the members of the 2003 Nominating Committee to submit nominations for open offices. If you would like to nominate someone for a Board position, please contact Nominating Committee member **Jeff Poley** (Committee Chair) jpoley2@unl.edu, **Joe Kelly** jrkelly@unlserve.unl.edu, or **Roger Clark** rogerc@kdsi.net.

Directions to the FEVR Depot:

From Omaha: Take Maple, Dodge or Center Street out to Highway 275. Follow Highway 275 to Fremont. Turn west (left) on 23rd Street (Highway 30). Follow 23rd Street to Somers Avenue. Turn south (left) on Somers Avenue and follow about 4 blocks until you reach 1835 North Somers Avenue.



From Lincoln: Follow I-80 East to I-680 North. Exit at either Dodge or Maple. Then follow directions above. Or follow Highway 77 to Fremont until you reach 23rd Street. Follow 23rd Street to Somers Avenue. Turn south (left) on Somers Avenue and follow about 4 blocks until you reach 1835 North Somers Avenue.

From Columbus / Grand Island: Follow Highway 30 into Fremont. Turn South on Somers Avenue and follow until you reach 1835 North Somers Avenue.

Denver NARP Meeting *by Dan Lutz, Past President*

The 2003 National Association of Railroad Passengers Region 10 meeting was held March 29 in Denver, Colorado.

There was record attendance at the meeting. Twenty Nebraskans attended; with a number of them traveling via the California Zephyr. There were quite a few from Iowa and Colorado though no attendees from South Dakota and Utah, the other states in Region 10.

I gave most of the Nebraska report at the meeting, covering commuter rail primarily, and a few other organizational items. Eric Miller covered the urban mass transit puzzle in Omaha.

Two of the other morning presentations were Colorado-centered. One was on the RTD FasTracks Plan Update, essentially, current developments with Denver's urban mass transit system, presented by the volunteer coordinator for the Transit Alliance. (This is a possible pattern for us to emulate in Omaha and/or Lincoln.) The other speaker talked on the Colorado Mobility Partnership Project, involving UP, BNSF and Colorado Department of Transportation and other statewide studies.

The afternoon presentation was quite profitable for those of us from Nebraska. Jack Tone, with Parsons Brinkerhoff consulting firm, had lived in Lincoln (and is a former PRN member) and did the update on the Nebraska rail plan in Nebraska Department of Roads. He spoke in the role of Chair of the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Intercity Rail Passenger Systems, National Science Foundation. He gave an overview of recent developments in U.S. intercity passenger rail, talked of many Amtrak routes, success stories in the Pacific NW, what trains are in jeopardy or threatened, and possible additions to the system if Amtrak ever achieves financial stability. We asked about Omaha-Kansas City, which he said is very much needed.

We took the tour to Colorado Railcar plant at Ft. Lupton, which was very interesting. The bad news was that there is no way they will put the Colorado Railcar DMU on tour to hit Lincoln and Omaha. They said switching by the freight railroads, UP or BNSF, costs several thousand dollars. They will take it to Chicago and St. Louis, but ruled out Lincoln and Omaha.

Gomaco Trolley Tour Report *by Eric Miller, District 2 Director*

On Saturday, April 12, Gomaco Trolley Company hosted a complete tour of their trolley facility in Ida Grove, Iowa. The meeting started at 9:30 AM with some very delicious large cinnamon rolls and coffee and orange juice. We then watched a half-hour video about Gomaco, part of which will be shown at the May 3 Fremont meeting. The tour of the trolley plant lasted about an hour and we were privileged to see every detail of production at Gomaco. Especially rewarding were the six trolley cars under construction. Two completely new cars are headed to Little Rock, Arkansas; three reconditioned cars from Melbourne, Australia are headed to Memphis, and another completely new car is also going to Memphis. After the trolley tour, our hosts took us to Gomaco University in the downtown area where employees are trained, offices are located, and above is a nice collection of antique automobiles.

ProRail Nebraska would like to sincerely thank Gomaco Trolley employees **Travis Ellis**, General Manager and **John Kallin**, Sales Manager for providing us with a fine tour of their outstanding facilities. It is our aspiration that some day soon Omaha will be running streetcars again as a viable and reliable transportation option.



Union Station, the newly developing Intermodal Transportation Center in downtown Denver – *by Eric Miller, District 2 Director*

Nullifying the Negative and Setting the Record Straight *by Richard Schmeling, District 1 Director*

The Omaha meeting on January 18th got some press coverage in the Omaha paper which had some spillover into Lincoln.

Member Robert Barlow called me and told me that KIBZ “The Blaze” 106.3 FM in Lincoln had been talking about commuter rail on the morning show. This rock station plays stuff that gives me a headache, so I never tune it in. The Alan Parsons Project is about the furthest I managed to progress from Lawrence Welk. Robert said the patter among “Animal” and his two morning show co-hosts went something like this – “I see they had this meeting in Omaha about bringing back an old form of transportation, passenger trains and trolleys.” Another replied, “What are they going to do? Run steam engines back and forth?” to which there was a round of giggles.

This sort of negative spin and misinformation deserved correction. By the time I had located the radio studio address and gotten a copy of a Colorado Rail Car brochure illustrating modern rail equipment and a ProRail Nebraska business card and had driven to the studio, “Animal” and his cohorts had long departed. They wouldn’t be back until Thursday morning the receptionist told me.

I got a sticky note and left the packet, along with a “Commuter Rail – A Better Way to Go” bumper sticker with a receptionist. No we weren’t going to

One Letter (Email) Can Make a Difference *by Richard Schmeling, District 1 Director*

When Governor Johanns announced last fall the appointment of a Committee to study Nebraska transportation with emphasis on intermodal connections and the use of all modes, the list that came out in the Lincoln Journal Star included people from the highway lobby, people from aeronautics, local government officials but no one from either of Nebraska’s major railroads or any of the shortline railroads serving the state.

ProRail member Don E. Kauffman sent an email to the governor calling to his attention the lack of railroad representation whereas the other modes were all represented. A few days later Don received a letter from Governor Johanns stating that several members of the new Committee had been omitted from the news release. He assured Don that Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe representatives would be included.

Shortly after I learned of this I visited with Beth Byan who represents the Union Pacific regarding legislative matters in Nebraska. She said that she had noticed the same thing Don and I had noticed about the lack of railroad representation and had been puzzled by it. Shortly after Don’s email hit the Governor’s Office, she received a phone call asking if she would be willing to serve on the committee! The including of railroad representatives was not something the governor originally thought of, and Don Kauffman’s email certainly got the desired result.

The lesson for all ProRailers is that even one letter or email can make a big difference. Don’t hesitate to contact government officials when you think rail interests are being neglected or unfairly treated.

run antique trains with steam engines. The commuter trains would be more comfortable than the Yugos that I was sure Animal and his buddies drove. I purposely left only one bumper stick so that Animal and his co-hosts would have to fight over who got it.

This is only one example of media and public reaction to “The Great Railroad Revival” which is taking place elsewhere but as foreign to Nebraskans as riding a camel to the shopping mall. It doesn’t have to be radio - - letters to the editor or comments by some public official can be just as inaccurate and damaging.

When this occurs, ProRail Nebraska members, without prompting or urging, should set the record straight. There should be a flood of letters to the newspaper, calls to the radio station or an info packet to the T.V. station. You don’t have to be a polished writer to advance the cause of passenger rail. Often a simple, from the heart, statement about the merits of Amtrak or commuter rail or light rail will get the point across.

Let’s not let this stuff go unanswered! Like Robert Barlow, you may be the only one who sees it or hears it. Let other ProRail Nebraska members know and nullify the negative and set the record straight - - as soon as possible.

Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition Meeting *by Joe Kelly*

The Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition met on March 15th in Chicago. President Rick Harnish reported that membership had hit an all-time high of 1,000 and thus necessitated moving the meeting to a bigger room since the average attendance now hovers around 100. Speaking to a full house, Harnish warned members to prepare for a tough year but also noted that the airline industry was near collapse and that Amtrak did receive its funding reauthorization without any cuts to service. In addition, all 3 major transportation funding bills were up for re-authorization and thus gives a chance for rail advocates to let their voices be heard in the political process.

Scott Bernstein of Reconnecting America (www.reconnectingamerica.org) reiterated the plight of the Airline industry and noted that most air travel in the USA is short trips from 300-500 miles. He mentioned a document on his website: "Short Air Routes That Could Be Served by Rail from Chicago" as a resource. Most notable was his position that Amtrak at 30 years of operation was "unsustainable". He suggested various ways of funding changes involving partnerships, or changing the legislation of Amtrak's enactment language as possible solutions. Most of the materials mentioned at the meeting can be found at the website.

Anthony Perl, author of "Rethinking Passenger Rail Policy in the United States", gave a lengthy review of successful high-speed rail projects. The Metroliner (1969) and the Turboliner were mentioned as projects that were very successful. Of all his presentation, probably the most radical proposal he spoke of was the 'The Chicago Plan' as proposed by congressman William Lipinski (D). Known as NRIP (National Rail Infrastructure Program) it proposes to upgrade freight rail infrastructure by raising the gas tax severely, tapping funds from a diesel fuel tax, a customs tax, a commuter rail ticket tax, and an oil/gas transit tax to give about \$1.7 billion to a pool to draw on for repair and expansion. One astute MHSRC member noted that unlike the highway and airport system funding, there is no federal participation in this plan whatsoever. For more information go to URL: http://www.irtba.org/headlines_full.asp?article=61&archive=true for a quick read on this bill. The theory is that by expanding freight capacity, you likewise expand passenger rail capacity. Perl signed copies of his book at the meeting.

Mike Blaszak wrapped up the meeting with a look at the history and future of the Cascades service- material readily available at any good library, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 that afternoon. The membership noted with pride that Rick Harnish had been selected to serve on Illinois Gov. Blagojevich's Rail Transit Panel. Harnish continues as President of the MHSRC for the foreseeable future.

The Canary and the Myths *truncated message by Amtrak President and CEO David Gunn:*

Now that I have had a little more than eight months at the helm of Amtrak, I've come to think of this company as the canary in the coal mine. Not that we're constantly endangered every day by unseen forces - that's true - but that the problems we've been forced to deal with are symptoms of a very big problem for everyone in the transportation industry and especially for freight and passenger railroads all over the country.

While I have concerns beyond this company, I run Amtrak and want to say a few words about our problems and our opportunities, and what I call the six myths of Amtrak.

The first myth is that Amtrak or passenger rail can be profitable. It can't, and others have gotten into a lot of hot water saying it can. In some regions with enough population density, some services can be profitable on an incremental basis - what railroaders call "above the rails." But it takes enormous public investment in track, signals, equipment and so on for a reliable system, which cannot be recovered from fares. Public dollars build airports and public dollars should build rail corridors, too.

The second myth is that the private sector is dying to take over Amtrak's service. This is not the case either. Remember why Amtrak was formed - because the private sector was losing millions of

dollars covering passenger rail's capital and operating costs. The economics of passenger rail haven't improved in the past thirty years and won't change much in the next thirty years.

The third myth goes like this: long distance trains are the big money losers. They are like a sea anchor on the whole system. Get rid of them and the problem's solved. Wrong again. Out of our current year federal subsidy need of \$1.2 billion, only \$300 million will go to covering the operating loss of long-distance trains.

Myth number four is that Amtrak is a featherbed for labor. First, those who know me know that I'm a demanding manager. But I also know that the wage rates at Amtrak are generally defensible vis-à-vis the rest of the industry - especially the transit systems. What we do have to do - and I mean labor and Amtrak - is deal with the work rules to improve efficiency. And we'll do that through our labor negotiations, not in the popular press.

Myth five is that the Northeast corridor can be profitable. As I said in myth one, when you total all the operating and capital costs - above and below the rails - it just doesn't work. The NEC covers its above the rails costs - barely - but requires and will always require public investment in its infrastructure. But that shouldn't surprise anyone - it is one of the biggest contiguous pieces of commercial real estate in the country and contains one of the most complex transportation operations in the world next to our taxpayer-supported national air traffic control system.

Finally, myth number six: there is a quick-fix that will solve everything. This, reminds me of the old adage "for every complex problem there is a simple answer and its probably wrong." People imply there is a "reform" that will solve Amtrak's problem - not so.

There are things that we can and should do to improve the service, reliability and efficiency of our operation and earn the public support and investment we need. In the short run, this means stabilizing the company, rebuilding our existing equipment and working to return the infrastructure to a state of good repair. While no single action will ever make us profitable in a true commercial sense, we can significantly improve our economics by focusing on our core business, improving our On Time performance and going after the excess. We've made a start by getting better cost-control mechanisms in place, streamlining and downsizing our management structure and getting out of the unprofitable express business. There will be a lot more that we can and will do to clean up the shop.

In the end, I think millions of people are going to continue to demand our service and support a public role for investing in passenger rail. Our job at Amtrak is to reach a level of efficiency, reliability and good service on our own that will make it easier for everyone - from passengers to politicians - to separate fact from myth and recognize the value of passenger rail to this country. The canary will be better off -- and so will the coalminer.

Famous Omaha Model Railroad Layout Prepares for Move *by Eric Miller, District 2 Director*

As the Durham Western Heritage Museum plans to phase out their HO Scale model railroad layout in favor of the more appropriate period piece new O Scale layout, ProRail Nebraska has been able to help them find a new location. Director Eric Miller and member Gerald Kopiasz recommended the Siouxland Historical Railroad Association (SHRA) to Museum Executive Director Randall Hayes. Miller met with members of the SHRA board of directors and museum staff in February to initiate the deal. The Sioux City Journal reported on February 25 that the model, built by Godfather's Pizza founder Willie Theisen, measures 13 feet by 68 feet, and contains model trains, buildings and landscaping illustrating western expansion from Omaha to Deadwood, S.D. SHRA Executive Director Larry Obermeyer and the board of directors would like to use the layout as part of their expanding rail museum as a historic and educational piece. Obermeyer said SHRA would like to see the building for the layout restored by Memorial Day 2004 for Iowa's sesquicentennial celebration. It is not for certain that this group will get the model railroad layout, but it seems that the SHRA is the best prospect so far. Anyone interested in helping the SHRA with the model railroad can call Larry Obermeyer at (712) 276-6432. Donations can be sent to Siouxland Historical Railroad Association, PO Box 1355, Sioux City, Iowa 51102.

Urban Rail Transit News *by Eric Miller, District 2 Director*

Albuquerque Announces \$700M Light Rail Transit Plans

The New Mexico Business Weekly reported on February 26 that Albuquerque will begin construction of a light rail transit system in 2006. The first phase route will logically connect major points with the downtown Alvarado Transportation Center. Mayor Martin Chavez said the light rail is necessary in order to make Albuquerque a major city. "We are the only city of any size in the West that has not aggressively pursued light rail," Chavez reportedly said. "We cannot allow ourselves to drop to the level of third-tier cities like Amarillo or Lubbock. We are a great city. This is an expression of the will of the citizens of Albuquerque to be a great city."

Denver's RTD Undaunted by Ice and Snow

The Denver Post reported on Saturday, March 22, that the Regional Transportation District did a marvelous job during some of the most difficult times during the massive snow storm that hit the Front Range at the end of March (it is called the second-worst blizzard in Colorado history) In fact, the southwest and central light rail lines in particular proved their worth, staying largely on schedule even during the storm's worst hours.

St. Paul Union Depot Put on Fast Track

Downtown St. Paul, Minnesota's newest landlord, Steve Frenz, has begun sprucing up one of the city's historic treasures, the Union Depot, reported the Minneapolis St. Paul Star Tribune on April 7. This parallels what we want to see done with the Omaha Burlington Station. Frenz wants to turn the station into a neighborhood center for the Lowertown community and in the long run, with the help of local public officials, he wants to return the depot to its roots: a transportation center, with a mix of travel options such as commuter and light rail trains, bicycle lockers and taxis. Frenz said within days of closing the depot sale, county and city officials were calling to set up meetings. "They wanted to make sure that their visions are in sync with ours. And I think they are," the Star Tribune reported him saying, "These days, government can't make these kinds of things happen by themselves." Martha Fuller, St. Paul's director of planning, said the depot building is a key factor in city plans for development in the area. The return of passenger and commuter trains to downtown is a high priority, she said. "We've got some common-sense plans," Frenz reportedly said. "We can't make it into a new building, but a lot of people like the older, historical feel, because there's so much character there."

Light Rail Line Likely Addition to Portland Transit Mall

As downtown Omaha's 16th Street Mall continues to have many troubles as a bus center, the Portland Oregonian reported on April 15 with some good news for the downtown Portland transit mall. The mall has seen a long decline, not nearly as bad as Omaha's, but still with the loss of businesses and residents; but now the mall seems to be headed for a new chapter as the fulcrum of Portland's growing and successful light rail transit system. Revamping the mall could be part of plans to build the region's next light-rail link, extending along the Interstate 205 corridor between Gateway and Clackamas Town Center. The grandest preliminary plan has a \$150 million price tag and would run light rail tracks on the malls between Union Station and Portland State University (with more than 20,000 students and growing), with the southern turnaround at Southwest Jackson Street. Another plan at \$100 million would extend tracks from Union Station to Main or Madison streets, leaving the door open to a further southerly expansion later. Attention is also being placed on automobile traffic and parking along the one-way street pair that composes the current mall.



2nd District Special Meeting June 7

"Downtown Omaha: Where it All Begins"

Make tracks to the ProRail Nebraska 2nd District Special Meeting on **Saturday, June 7th, 2003**, in downtown Omaha. This event is one you will not want to miss, and will cover a small variety of activities, all in the same general area. If you enjoyed the last meetings at Gomaco in April and at the Library in January, you haven't seen anything yet! This meeting will begin at **9:30 AM** at the **W. Dale Clark Library**, 14th and Farnam St, where we will have a regular two hour meeting. Next we will eat lunch at **12:00 Noon** at **Spaghetti Works**, 11th and Howard St. in the Old Market. After that, from **1:30-2:30 PM**, **Ray Lowry** will guide us on a short walking tour of the Historic Rail District on 10th Street.

The keynote speaker for this meeting is **Senator E. Benjamin Nelson**, who will give an Amtrak and TEA-3 legislative report. ProRail Nebraska Secretary **Dave Purdy** will present a plan for light rail in Omaha, which members can discuss and give feedback to. We will also discuss some of the recent problems with MAT including the federal grant for a trolley planning study that has yet to be initiated. A report will also be given on the situation of Kansas City light rail and commuter rail projects.

Reservations are not required and the only cost is your individual lunch at Spaghetti Works. As the day is broken up into 3 events, ProRail Nebraska members are invited to attend any number of events, or all of them. Contact Director Eric Miller at (402)681-5336 or emillerz@yahoo.com for questions or more information.



Timetable Challenge *by Mike Hromanik, President*

The winner of last month's Timetable Challenge is **Steven J. Tan Creti** of Gardner KS. Mr. Tan Creti proposed a train leaving from the Minneapolis/St. Paul at 6:30 in the evening, running through Manketa and Worthington MN, LeMars, IA and arriving in Sioux City at 11:00 p.m., to Onawa, IA and arriving in Omaha at 1:15 A.M. The train would run through St. Joseph Mo., then on to Kansas City and points south on the old Santa Fe line via Newton, Kansas. The train arrives at Oklahoma City at 8:25 A.M., and then continues on to Dallas. The return trip passes through Oklahoma City at 10:10 p.m., Kansas City at 3:30 A.M., Omaha at 5:55 A.M., and returns to Minneapolis at 12:15 p.m. Mr. Tan Creti will receive a nice certificate, as well as a ProRail Nebraska t-shirt. (As soon as we get them designed and printed up!) Participation was kind of thin, so I encourage more participation for the next Timetable Challenge, which is: Name this proposed Minneapolis to Dallas Train!



General Group Information



Welcome new ProRail Nebraska members who have joined as of February!

Steven Anderson,	Omaha
Howard Hildebrand,	Lecompton, KS
Hugh Riley,	Norfolk
Jim Reisdorff,	David City
Jim Burden,	Lincoln

ProRail Nebraska on the Internet

ProRail Nebraska has a discussion group (through "Yahoo! Groups") in which any ProRail member or visitor can participate. You can choose just to read the messages or to actively participate with your

comments to the group. Many up-to-the-minute news items about Amtrak and other railroad issues of interest are contributed regularly by members of this group.

To subscribe to the ProRail Nebraska discussion group, send an e-mail to: ProRailNebraska-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com. You will receive a verification e-mail from Yahoo Groups.

If you have questions or wish to contact the group moderator, send an e-mail to gary@thejoneses.com

Newsletter Information

This newsletter is published on a quarterly basis and submissions are encouraged and will be credited. Please only submit news you feel should definitely be included in the newsletter. Submissions for the next newsletter should be sent to the acting editor's house address or via email on or before **July 20, 2003**.

Each quarterly newsletter will feature a photo taken by a ProRail Nebraska member. If you have a recent railroad photo, send it to the acting editor by letter or email on or before the submission deadline. Photo will be chosen by the acting editor and any material will be graciously and promptly returned.

Editor's Note:

After successfully completing four issues of the ProRail Nebraska NEWS, I am now retiring from my temporary post. As my senior year in college predicts to be a busy one, especially with applying for graduate school, I will be unable to devote myself to the newsletter. A new, hopefully permanent, editor will be transitioned in for the next issue in August.

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Photo of the Quarter

California Zephyr pulls into Holdrege – *by Eric Miller, District 2 Director*



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