



ProRail Nebraska NEWS

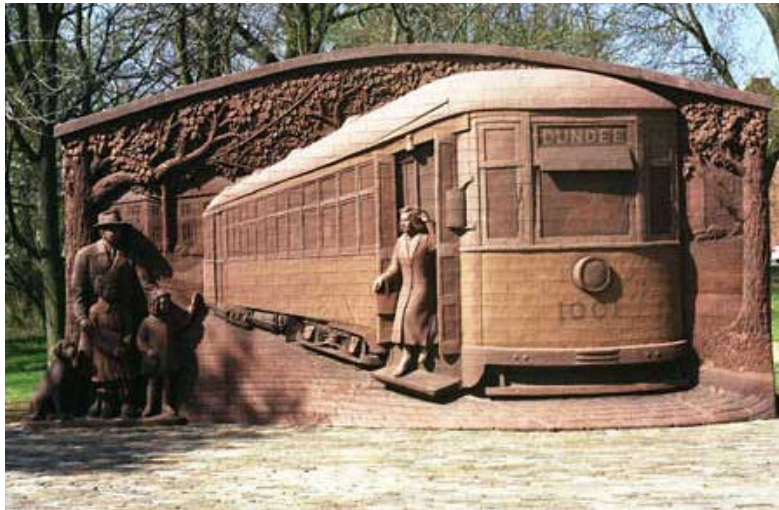
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ProRail Nebraska, Inc.
3915 Apple St.
Lincoln, NE 68503

Volume XIII

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Fall Membership Meeting September 20th



Dundee Streetcar Memorial. Photo by Eric Miller

ProRail Nebraska's fall membership meeting will be held on Saturday, September 20 at the Union Pacific Room at Creighton University in Omaha. (See enclosed maps) Registration and coffee will begin at 9:30 AM, the meeting will convene at 10:00 AM, and conclude at 3:00 PM. We are very happy to have as speaker Ms. Barbara J. Richardson, Vice President, Marketing and Sales, of Amtrak. **Please pre-register by contacting a Board member or by mailing a short note stating you'll be attending.** Lunch will be at the Dundee Dell, near Dundee's "newly discovered" streetcar memorial. **Registration for the meeting will total \$7** to cover costs for room reservation.

President's Message *by Dick Schmeling*

For our members who haven't had an opportunity to attend a meeting lately and see our new ProRail T-shirts and polo shirts, information concerning them appears elsewhere in this newsletter. You can also obtain one by mail order if you are not able to make a meeting. Our General Membership Meeting for this fall is set for September 20, 2003 in Omaha and further details also appear in the newsletter. We hope you can attend.

One week prior to our Fall meeting there will be a "Rail Summit" meeting in Lincoln. This meeting was suggested by Senator DiAnna Schimek who is

one of the Legislature's two representatives to the Midwest Rail Compact which is promoting new passenger service on spokes out of Chicago. Laura Kliever of the Council of State Governments and

Rick Harnish of the Midwest High Speed Rail Initiation will be present and speak. Representatives from Iowa and Missouri have been invited to attend also. The Summit will be held at the Nebraska Department of Roads auditorium in Lincoln. There will be no charge for attending and I would like to encourage every ProRail member to attend. There

President's Message *continued from pg.1*

will be updates at this meeting on Lincoln to Omaha Commuter Rail, Lincoln's Transportation and Mobility Study, the Omaha Transportation study being done by URS Consulting and other speakers.

Although the summer seems to have been quiet, ProRail has not been asleep. Vice President Gary Emenitove has updated our Membership Directory and it will be mailed to the membership soon along with a draft of the ProRail Long Range Plan. Members are asked to review the plan and be prepared to suggest changes at the September 20th meeting so that it can be finalized and formally adopted.

Dick Schmeling was appointed by the Mayor to serve on the committee to select the consulting firm for the Lincoln Transportation and Mobility Study. Eric Miller has been selected to serve on the Citizen's Transportation Committee which will work with the consultants looking at Lincoln's transportation needs. Dick Schmeling and

Eric Miller have compiled a list of persons and entities to receive our newsletter and have been working with Dan Lutz to provide a list to Senator Schimek for her to invite to "Rail Summit". Dan Lutz continues to monitor NARP releases and follow news from MOKS Rail and other rail passenger groups. Dave Purdy, Eric Miller and others have been instrumental in getting light rail included in the Omaha MAT study. Tom Brewer continues to help out Amtrak in Hastings and Jackson Hammitt keeps us all advised about the latest developments regarding Nebkota Railroad in his area.

Lincoln has been struggling to deal with constant city growth and is lagging behind in being able to do infrastructure (streets, water mains, sewer, electrical, etc.). This is a Common problem faced by metropolitan areas that have been expanding. Over the past year a task force has been studying this problem and has given its report to the Mayor. One of the solutions was to impose a 5~ per gallon fuel tax for gasoline sold in the City of Lincoln and another source of revenue will be a proposed increase in the wheel tax. These measures are now being considered by the Lincoln City Council. City Councilman Terry Werner has introduced a

proposal to dedicate one cent of the new fuel tax to ~~Lincoln's contribution toward~~ the construction of the proposed Lincoln to Omaha Commuter Rail system. This would be contingent upon Omaha also contributing to the cost of the system and the State of Nebraska providing part of the Local Match for the funding. Werner also proposes to dedicate another cent of the fuel tax to implement upgrades to public transportation in Lincoln as recommended by the Transportation and Mobility Study now underway in Lincoln. How does ProRail fit into what some might say would be a State-Local issue? We have recognized from the start that the key for Omaha to Lincoln Commuter Rail to work will be enhanced public transportation for both Lincoln and Omaha to connect with the Commuter trains and Wilbur Smith Associates agree.

An additional complication has recently arisen in the form of a letter from Senator Tom Baker, Chairman of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee of the Nebraska Legislature addressed to the Lincoln City Council. The thrust of the letter is that although current state law allows cities to levy a gasoline tax, they have not done so in the past. Baker cites a precedent of the gasoline tax being used for highway construction and warns the City of Lincoln that enactment of the City gasoline tax would be viewed by the Legislature with disfavor and might result, if the City went ahead, with the State cutting back on funding to the City. I am writing a letter to Senator Baker and communicating to the City Council on behalf of ProRail. My letter is carefully worded to limit our concern to the aspect of the controversy which denies to the City a source of funding to improve transportation other than highways. The gas tax measures will come up on Monday, August 11th before the Lincoln City Council which does not give me time to consult with the ProRail Board of Directors to the extent I might like to. I have visited with Dan Lutz about the matter and he will be sending E-Mails to members of the Board about this problem. In order to act in a timely manner, I must forge ahead, using my best judgment and hoping that the Board will understand the need for immediate action. I'll have a report at the August 16th Board of Directors Meeting and a further update at the September 20th Fall General Membership Meeting in Omaha.

President's Message *continued from pg.2*

Last, but certainly not least, has been the latest crisis over funding for Amtrak. Newsletter Editor Mike Hromanik will provide a discussion in this newsletter of the various bills which have been introduced in Congress regarding Amtrak. During the summer Congressman Bereuter's office contacted ProRail and asked about our opinions

concerning an Amtrak bill introduced in the House of Representatives and other pending Amtrak legislation. Dan Lutz responded with our thoughts to Congressman Bereuter. Congress is currently in recess and will reconvene in September. ProRail members need to contact Senators and House of Representatives members indicating support for Amtrak and urging that Amtrak be reauthorized and funded adequately for the next several years so that new Amtrak President David Gunn can continue to expand and improve Amtrak. It would be well to emphasize that we can't put all of our transportation eggs in one basket. The 9-11 terrorist attacks

demonstrate that air traffic is vulnerable to complete shutdown due to terrorist attacks.

The security measures taken to counter this threat may or may not be effective. A strong, healthy national rail passenger system is necessary, if for no other reason, than to prevent transportation gridlock in case of additional terrorist activity. Trains are a lot harder to hijack than airplanes and the tracks usually don't lead to the White House, the Pentagon and Capitol Hill. So far as I know, not a single American passenger train has ever been hijacked and flown to Cuba, either! I look forward to seeing all of you on September 13th in Lincoln and again on September 20th in Omaha. At times the challenge to keep Amtrak running and get new passenger trains on track seems near impossible, but I see clear signs recently that government realizes the importance of rail in our nation's transportation mix, and we need to keep hammering that point home.

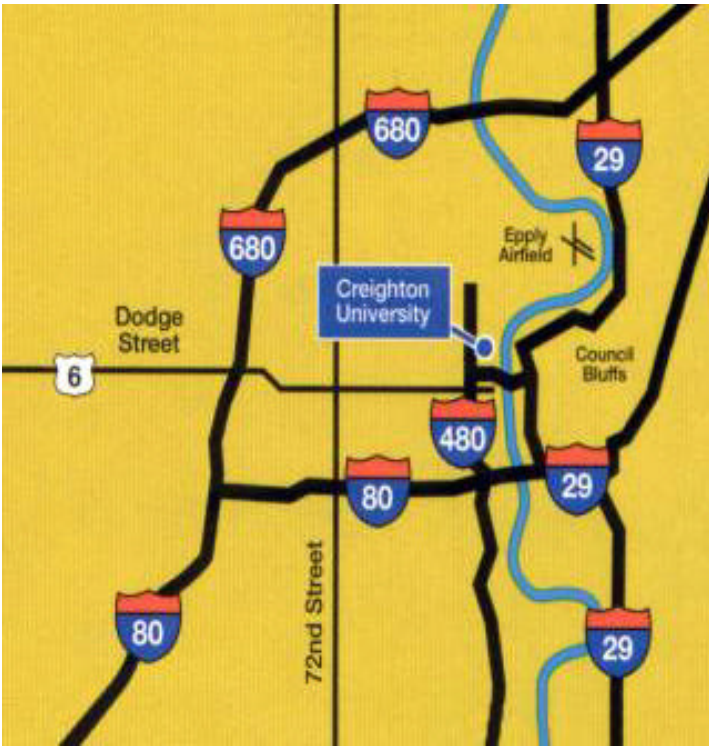
ProRail T-Shirts and Polo Shirts Are Now Available!!

T-shirts-\$12.60. Polo Shirts-\$19.00

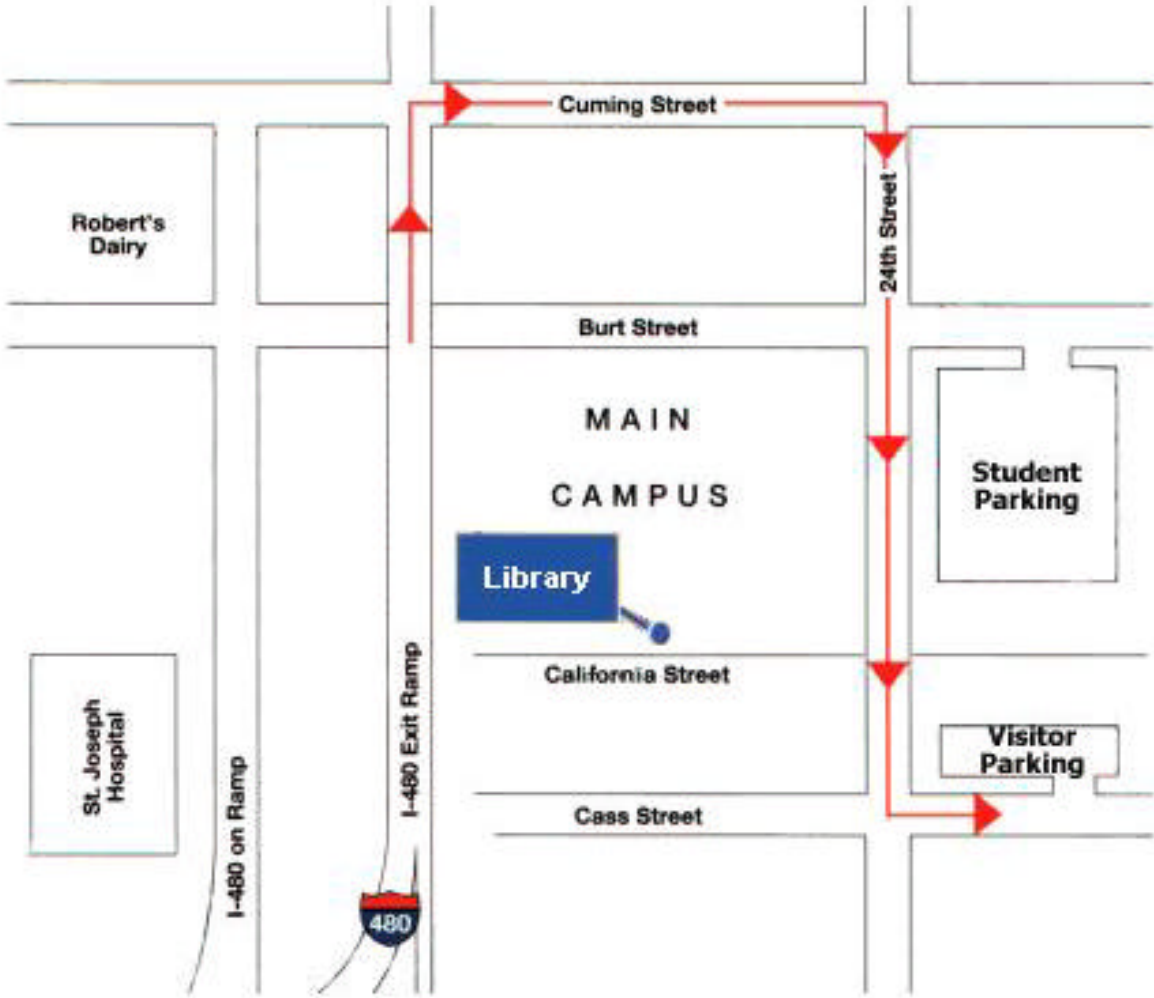
Contact Dick Schmeling or see them at the upcoming meeting.

Rail Summit September 13th in Lincoln

A "Rail Summit" will be held September 13th from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Nebraska Department of Roads, 1500 Nebraska Highway 2, Lincoln NE. The meeting will bring together an assortment of officials, groups, and individuals, all who are interested in passenger rail service in the state. Speakers will include State Senator Dianna R. Schimek, Mayor Colleen Seng of Lincoln, Rick Harnish of the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, and many others. The summit will include an open forum to discuss ideas, ask questions, and get answers. Everyone is encouraged to attend.



Maps to Creighton University in Omaha



Atlanta Streetcar plans are underway

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported on August 1 that Atlanta Streetcar, a non-profit group, has already raised \$100,000 for a feasibility study for an 8-mile streetcar line along Peachtree. Businessman Michael Robison, Atlanta City Councilman H. Lamar Willis, and state Sen. Tommie Williams, recently returned from Portland, Ore., where they talked with officials and developers about their success with a new streetcar line. In fact, the \$55 million investment in Portland helped create more than \$1 billion in redevelopment in a struggling warehouse district. The study will take up to four months to complete and will look at potential ridership, revenue, expenses, financing and route options. Other cities that are planning similar modern streetcars include Washington, D.C.; Seattle, WA; Vancouver, BC; Charlotte, NC; Winston-Salem, NC; and Miami, FL; and Tacoma, Washington's new system opens August 22, 2003.

Portland Extends Streetcar; Revitalizes Transit Mall

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that construction is now underway to extend the Portland Streetcar to the planned South Waterfront development. Portland Mayor Vera Katz reportedly said that Public works projects like light rail and the streetcar are the best ways for us at home to help create jobs and opportunities for private investments. Portland State University reported on July 16th that plans are underway to extend MAX light rail to the university via a revitalized transit mall, which is also part of the \$450 million South Corridor project, which will bring light rail through downtown and south to Clackamas.

St. Louis MetroLink celebrates 10 years

Several predictions made by light rail supporters ten years ago have come true, reported the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on July 31. The line was predicted to extend east to Shiloh/Scott Air Force Base in Illinois by 2003, which just opened on June 23 at an average cost of \$17 million per mile. Ridership is also pretty much on target, with 35,000 per year predicted in 2000; which turned out to be about 33,000 and 12,000 more in 2001 after the St. Clair County line opened. Another reported prediction from 1993 was that MetroLink would foster more than \$1 billion in private development around its stations and in a news release about its anniversary, Metro lists 31 developments totaling just under \$2 billion in investment around MetroLink stations. Currently, the Cross Country extension to the St. Louis Galleria is under construction and is planned to open in 2006.

New Denver light rail line attracts 1.6 million riders

On July 2, the Denver Business Journal reported that the newest light rail line attracted 14 percent more riders than predicted from May 1, 2002 to April 30, 2003. RTD General Manager Cal Marsella proudly announced that RTD built all of their light rail lines on time and on budget, and have exceeded ridership projects on all three. The new line is the Central Platte Valley and connects Denver Union Station to the rest of the 16 mile system. Funding for the new line came from only local-level public and private sources.

Houston METRORail construction nears end

Houston's light rail system, connecting the University of Houston to downtown to Reliant Park, will open in January, 2004. The 7.5 mile line costs \$324 million, will have 16 stations, and is estimated to have 31,000 riders in the first year.

Phoenix light rail construction one year away

The Arizona Republic reported on June 30 that progress on the light rail system was celebrated Friday at a ceremonial luncheon attended by about 800 consultants, elected officials and business executives. The Phoenix Citizens Transit Commission Chairwoman was named Light Rail Community Advocate of the Year and an Arizona Republic columnist was given a Media Appreciation Award for his columns on mass transit. Valley Metro Rail Executive Director Wulf Grote reportedly said that in less than a year, they are going to begin construction, and are already planning an extension to Metrocenter. The initial 20.3-mile line runs from north Phoenix to Mesa. Phoenix Mayor Skip Rimsza lauded cooperation among Valley mayors, who sit with him on the light rail governing board. "This is sending a message on how broad the support for light rail is in our community," he reportedly said.

Gas Prices May reach Highest Level in History *by Nelson Antosh and Jenalia Moreno*

From the Houston Chronicle, Aug. 22, 2003

The highest gasoline prices in history appear to be just down the road. Dwindling supplies in the face of increased demand threaten to push pump prices over the national record set last mid-March, when markets were shaken by the prospects of a war with Iraq.

On Thursday, the markets "went ballistic," says Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst for the Oil Price Information Service in Lakewood, N.J. That means the highest pump prices ever seen are just a few days away. The futures price in New York jumped Thursday by more than 9.5 cents, the biggest move since 1991, while cash market increases of 10 to 15 cents were common across the country, Kloza said. The wholesale price in California is already at a record.

That puts the nationwide retail record average of \$1.722 on March 18 within striking distance, as well as the Texas record average of \$1.616 also set on that date and the Houston record of \$1.639 set May 12, 2001.

"The pump prices are moving," said Alan Stanley, an oil trader who didn't see anything less than \$1.55 on his drive home Thursday afternoon. The wholesale market follows the futures market on a daily basis, he said, and pump prices trail not long after that.

"Isn't it pitiful," Mary Mechler asked while paying \$1.56 a gallon at a Chevron station on Washington Avenue. She pumped \$18.60 worth into her 8-year-old Toyota Camry, "and I only got three-fourths of a tank." "Outta sight," said retiree Andrew Elliott, in

a pickup that he plans to drive as little as possible. Ray Guerra was surprised by the \$1.59 per gallon at a Texaco, speculating that the gasoline sellers are "playing the Labor Day weekend."

AAA spokesman Justin McNaull in Washington said the markets hate uncertainty and that accounts for the big jump in the cash markets. The current dilemma for drivers dates back to early summer when gasoline inventories were lower than normal, only to be drawn down further in recent weeks. Meanwhile, demand increased as the summer progressed.

A lot of people delayed their travel because of a cold and wet spring in the Northeast and the war with Iraq, according to the AAA. Now they are taking a last shot at summer vacation, with predictions that 28.2 million, or 2.2 percent more than a year ago, will travel by motor vehicle on Labor Day weekend.

Meanwhile, gasoline output has been hampered by a spate of refinery problems, and gasoline imports have fallen. The Wednesday federal inventory report showed another weekly decline in gasoline, but it wasn't until one of the biggest refiners in the Northeast started buying in New York harbor that prices really took off, said Kloza.

This action "spooked a lot of the others," who began to worry about getting enough gas of the right specifications to make deliveries on contracts. Stanley said that people realized, all of a sudden, "there really aren't that many barrels for sale out there."

URS Omaha Transit Study Underway

by Eric Miller, District 2 Director

URS, a private consulting firm, is currently conducting the next study phase for Omaha's 10th Street rail line, set to be completed in December 2003. Along with completing the 10th Street Major Investment Study (MIS), several bus improvements are also being looked at, which include tying the

overall system in with an Omaha-Lincoln commuter rail line. For more information on the study, contact URS consultants Dennis Wilson at 334-8181 or Bill Troe at 952-2522.

Below is a new feature to our newsletter that hopefully we can continue. Readers are encouraged to submit their own stories regarding alternate railroad realities. Use your imagination and let everyone enjoy your concepts of “what if” or “what might be”!!

THE OUTER YARD LIMITS

As your train enters the tunnel, you feel a jolt, a strange acceleration unlike anything you have experienced. The windows of your car fill with a strange pale light, a light that grows as the moments go by. You assume you've reached the end of the tunnel, but instead you've reached a place where dream and reality combine, where nothing now is like anything from a moment before. The train stops, and the Conductor announces, "last stop, the Outer Yard Limits".....

A TRIP FROM COLUMBUS TO KEARNEY

By Mike Hromanik

You settle down in the lounge as the train silently accelerates out of Columbus. Your bound for Kearney. You've just got time to read the e-mail on your problematic steam turbine. The cantenary poles quickly beginning flying by so fast you can no longer see them. You fix your eyes on the cattle in the distance, everything close is just a blur. The electric locomotive is powerful but silent. The cattle barely notice you passing at 120 mph. Every 5 minutes you fly through the buzzing little towns spaced just as they were founded a 150 years ago, the distance a steam engine could travel before needing water. You pass their fuel plant, just like yours. "I wonder how their turbine bearings are wearing," you think to yourself. Your view out the window is momentarily blocked by the double stack going 100 mph in the opposite direction. The track slightly curves, and you see the next town quickly approaching in the distance.

You also see the massive silos, the fuel tanks, the smokestack, the transformers; all the signature signs that your in "energy country", or "the world's largest solar panel", as it says on the state's timetable and highway map. You think back as a kid, when things were so different. When it seemed the whole state was drying up. Of course, that was before "the change." The change

they'll be celebrating next week on the "Energy Day" state holiday. "That and Arbor Day always throws me off" you think as you realize the bank will be closed. Of course, if anything deserved a state holiday, it was "the change"; That period of time (they picked a specific day for the holiday) when the "grain fuels", soy diesel and ethanol, became more economical than gasoline. The day when the entire state's crop production entered the bottomless energy market. The day when "crop surpluses" ceased to exist.

The modular ethanol and soy diesel plants quickly sprang up, strategically placed along the rail lines. Of course fuel wasn't cheap anymore, so economics kept the plants small and numerous, minimizing the energy used to get the corn and soybeans to the plants. They then maximized the energy efficiency by taking the corn, the cob, everything. They standardized on a plant that would burn the cobs and generate steam that produced both fuel and electricity; "cogeneration." Those same cogeneration plants were now powering the very train you were on now, as well as every other train moving along the 4-track main. "Kearney next stop" the Conductor calls out. You grab your paperwork and coat as the train silently comes to a stop.

HRRHS Calls for Donations for Burlington Station

by Eric Miller, District 2 Director

The Heartland Railroad Historical Society (HRRHS) is currently taking steps to initiate a new commitment to collecting funds that will be used to direct or assist the restoration of the Burlington Station in Omaha. HRRHS President Gerald Kopiasz named ProRail Nebraska District 2 Director Eric Miller to be the Program Manager for the Burlington Station project. The fundraising drive is called Save Our Station (SOS) and all funds collected will be held by the Heartland Railroad Historical Society until a restoration project begins. The cornerstone of SOS is a free gift, the video "Trolley: The Cars That Built Our Cities," in exchange for a minimum donation of \$10. The money from SOS will only be used to both help

restore the Burlington Station and improve rail passenger facilities. HRRHS will hold an event to collect donations called "Kickin' it at the Burlington Station" at the Amtrak station platform on Saturday, September 6th, which is also days from the Burlington Station's 72nd birthday. The event will begin when Amtrak #6 arrives at the station and end when Amtrak #5 leaves the station. To make a donation and receive your copy of the video, contact Gerald Kopiasz at (402)598-6641 or Eric Miller at (402)681-5336, or mail to: PO Box 501, Council Bluffs, IA 51502-0501. We hope to see you at the station on September 6th!

A Quick Overview of Current Amtrak Bills *by Mike Hromanik*

Three major bills dealing with Amtrak are currently being debated in Congress. From the Senate, bills have been proposed by Senator Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX). The Bush Administration has also produced a proposal.

The Bush proposal seeks to turn over the responsibility of passenger train operation to the states, with states also becoming partially responsible for funding. The system model that the Bush Administration would like to establish nationwide is that of the "Cascades" service in Washington and Oregon. The states determined a need for the service, financed equipment purchases and infrastructure improvements, than had Amtrak operate the service. The Federal Government would provide matching funds for these types of efforts. Given this concept for intra-state cooperation and financing, this bill does not appear to bode well for the multi-state, long distance train.

Senator Hutchinson's Bill has a motto of "National or Nothing!!" Co sponsors of the Bill include Trent Lott, Olympia Snowe, and Conrad Burns. The bill includes \$12 billion for Amtrak operating expenses

over the next 6 years. The bill seeks to improve speed and on time performance nationwide. An independent non-profit corporation, the Rail Infrastructure Finance Corporation, would administer \$48 billion in government backed bonds that including financing of freight railroad infrastructure improvements. These improvements would also serve to benefit passenger service, increasing speed and capacity.

Senator Holling's Bill is modeled after legislation that created the Interstate Highway System. The northeast corridor would get \$1.31 billion annually for capital improvements. The northeast corridor would be set up as a separate entity within Amtrak and would reinvest any operating "profits" ("Above the Rail Profits") into the corridor. \$1.55 billion annually would be used to create new high speed corridors throughout the country. Finally, long distance and state supported short and medium distance trains would get an \$850 million annually.

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California Zephyr #6 in front of Omaha Amtrak and Burlington Stations – *by Eric Miller*



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