



ProRail Nebraska NEWS

www.trainweb.org/prorailnebraska

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

Volume X

January 2003

Membership Meeting Set For Grand Island on February 22

This year's winter membership meeting will be held at the same place as last year, once again partaking in the festivities alongside the Great Plains Chapter, NRHS, which will have their annual banquet meeting in the evening at 6:00 PM, with a program by Lou Schmitz to follow. The meeting will be at the recently renovated CB&Q railroad depot (Plum Street Station). Coffee and registration will start at **9:30 AM**, the meeting will convene at **10:00 AM**, and end at about **2:00 PM**. Food will be catered in and meal cost will be **\$10.00**. Pre-registration is required to get a head count for lunch (See enclosed registration form). Guest speakers may include State Senator Ray Aguilar and a local Amtrak employee. There will also be important updates on local rail issues, including commuter rail and midwest regional rail. This will definitely be a meeting worth attending!


Here are directions to drive to the Plum Street Station at **603 N. Plum Street** in Grand Island:



Highway 30 westbound: Turn north on Oak Street west of the BNSF overpass. Turn east on 4th Street just north of the Union Pacific railroad tracks. Go two blocks and turn left on Plum Street (west of BNSF

overpass). **Interstate 80 approaching G.I. either eastbound or westbound:** Turn north at the I-80/U.S. 281 interchange, proceed to Highway 30. Turn east and stay on Highway 30 through downtown to Oak Street and turn north. Cross the Union Pacific railroad tracks and turn east on 4th Street two blocks to Plum Street and turn left. **U.S. 281 or NE Hwy. 2 from the north and west:** Go south on

Broadwell to Five Points and south on Eddy to 4th Street. Turn east and go to Plum Street, and turn left.

Other meetings coming up: NARP Region 10 meeting to be held in Denver, Colorado at Wynkoop Brewery on Saturday, March 29. ProRail Nebraska Annual meeting to be held at Fremont on Saturday, May 3. Details to follow. 

Commuter Rail Public Meetings!

N-TRAC recently released the times and places for four public meetings regarding the commuter rail study being done by Wilbur Smith Associates. Please join NTRAC and Wilbur Smith Associates at one of four open house meetings listed on the following page. ProRail Nebraska needs your input at these meetings!



Put in your two cents' worth

At a public open house for the Nebraska public transit & rail study

January 14, 2003 7:00-9:00 PM



Norfolk

Holiday Inn Express
920 S. 20th Street
Meeting Room C

Grand Island

Holiday Inn MidTown
2503 South Locust
Islander Room

January 15, 2003 7:00-9:00 PM

Lincoln

Ramada Limited South
1511 Center Park Rd.
Goldenrod Room

Omaha

Best Western Settle Inn
609 N. 109th Court
King Arthur Room

Thinking beyond adding more lanes *by Richard Schmeling, from the Lincoln Journal Star*

As the study of the feasibility of commuter rail between Lincoln and Omaha and other corridors in Nebraska gets under way, there are more questions than answers. However, there are some basic facts that are known.

A "Lincoln Journal Star" question to the man on the street (LJS, Nov. 9) was, essentially, "Which would be more useful, commuter rail between Lincoln and Omaha or adding two lanes to Interstate 80?" That was the wrong question to ask for several reasons. First of all, the widening of Interstate 80 between Lincoln and Omaha is already under way. It will happen no matter what we conclude about commuter rail. The real question should have been, "When we find out that the additional pair of lanes on I-80 hasn't resolved traffic congestion, what should we do?"

National statistics show that by adding a pair of lanes to Interstate or Freeway does not result in a 50 percent increase in traffic rather only 40 percent. Each additional pair of lanes produces diminishing returns in terms of vehicles moved. The other known fact is that the Interstate system was originally designed with the idea of adding one pair of lanes on any route. These are added in the center of the roadway, and new bridge construction is not required. However, the next pair of lanes to be added to I-80 would require that all bridges and overpasses over the Interstate be lengthened and replaced an extraordinarily costly proposition.

Second, adding lanes on the Interstate does little or nothing for the 40 percent of Nebraska residents who do not drive an automobile because they are too young, too old, disabled, can't afford to own a vehicle or prefer not to drive. Transportation equity

requires that we provide equal opportunity for all citizens.

The commuter rail won't spring into existence overnight. Assuming a favorable feasibility study, it could well be four to five years before a system is in operation. Thus, we need to start now, so that we will be ready for the increase in traffic as Lincoln and Omaha grow and expand toward each other.

One frequently asked question is, "How will I get to my ultimate destination once I get off that train?" The answer is that the commuter rail system, in order to succeed, must be a seamless system that has good connections with other modes. This can be provided by Star Tran in Lincoln and Metro Area Transit in Omaha. There are always taxis and some hotels and motels provide courtesy vans. Dedicated vans from Ashland to Mahoney State Park and to and from the stop serving the UNO Medical Center

would be a part of the system. Park-and-ride lots at stops along the way would allow you to use your own personal vehicle for connectivity.

Not only will Lincoln and Omaha residents benefit, but local stops at Waverly, Ashland, Gretna, Ralston and elsewhere by some of the trains will help serve the transportation needs of those communities. Service will probably include a mix of "express" and "local" trains with the latter serving the intermediate stops.

The cost of the commuter rail system will be moderated because the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe corridor between Lincoln and Omaha already is in place. Thus land acquisition will be limited to station grounds and parking lots. The commuter line may also partner with Burlington Northern and Santa Fe for part of the cost with the freight railroad utilizing the extra tracks of the commuter rail line during times when the commuter trains are not running.

A recent study showed that you are 30 times more likely to walk away from a rail collision or derailment alive and uninjured than if you have an accident in a motor vehicle. The rising accident toll on Interstate 80 between Lincoln and Omaha demonstrates that a safer mode of travel is needed.

Modern passenger equipment has reliable heating and air conditioning systems unlike the previous generation of passenger equipment which was often

dirty and unattractive. Computer ports, fax access and phone service indicate that the time on the train would be productive time rather than "down time" en route. Or you could simply sit back, enjoy the trip and relax without having to worry about drunk drivers and icy roadways.

A check with auto insurers writing coverage in Nebraska indicates that if you would switch from car to train for your commute or business trips, you could save anywhere from 22 percent to 30 percent on your auto insurance premiums.

The ticket price for the train will not be known for some time yet, but it should be competitive with the cost of driving a motor vehicle. A round trip of 108 miles Lincoln to Omaha in a Ford Taurus, according to the American Automobile Association, costs 60 cents per mile. This comes out to a total of \$64.80 for the round trip.

Rail as an alternative to highway travel is working throughout the United States and the rest of the world. It will work in Nebraska, too. We just have to be visionary and benefit from lessons learned elsewhere. You can't pave your way out of congestion!

Richard Schmeling of Lincoln is director of District 1 for ProRail Nebraska. His Honda Accord has more than 210,000 miles, but he would like to have an alternative means of transportation some day.



California Zephyr Dining Menu *by Eric Miller*

In the fall of 2002, Amtrak revised its dining car selections for the entire nation and menu items are basically the same for the whole country. A couple months ago, I sampled some of the meals on the Capitol Limited and the best part was the desert selections – I tried all four options and every one of them was very tasty. While some prices are a little high, remember that the meals are free with a first class ticket. Here's what's available in the California Zephyr's Diner today:

BREAKFAST

Two Fresh Eggs	6.00
Classic French toast	6.50
Pancakes	6.50
Continental	5.75
Bacon	2.25
Turkey Sausage Links	2.25

LUNCH

Steak Burger	7.75
Grilled Reuben	8.50

Southwest Chicken Salad	8.75
Vegetable Stir-Fry	7.00
Vegetable Soup	3.50

DINNER

Grilled NY Strip Steak	7.50
Chicken L'orange	12.50
Center-Cut Pork Chop	14.50
Regional Seafood Selection	16.00
Penne Pasta	11.00

BEVERGES

Coffee Regular or Decaf	1.50
Tea – Hot, Iced, Reg., or Herbal	1.50
Milk	1.50
Soft Drinks Reg. or Diet	1.50
Bottled Water	1.50
Domestic Beer	3.50
Premium Beer	4.25

DESSERTS

Vanilla Ice Cream	1.75
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Amtrak Funding Update *courtesy of Dave Bowe, Friends of Amtrak*

Friends of Amtrak website: <http://trainweb.org/crocon/amtrak.html>

Amtrak President David Gunn has written to Congressional appropriators on December 16th, restating Amtrak's need for \$1.2 billion in the current fiscal year, 2003. That's the amount the Senate Appropriations Committee approved, though the House Appropriations Committee approved only \$762 million.

The Bush Administration approved even less at \$521 million. Gunn wrote that "there are no easy options to any of us if the funding level falls below \$1.2 billion." Gunn wrote, "I have rewritten our [2003] budget submitted by my predecessor, and it is focused on repairing equipment needed for revenue service and making investments in our infrastructure just to maintain current speed and operations. In doing so, I had to cut or defer nearly \$200 million in activities and projects critical to this railroad just to get to the \$1.2 billion level ... The capital budget for [2003] ... tight as it is, will allow us to hold the existing system together and operate through this year without the threat of insolvency. During that period of time, you and your colleagues in Congress, as well as the Administration, will have the opportunity to debate a meaningful reauthorization bill and chart our future without the constant distraction of financial crises." He continued, "In May, I took over a railroad that had lost focus and engaged in financial games to make it look like the railroad was making progress toward self-sufficiency. As the DOT Inspector General and others have made clear, no progress was made toward self-sufficiency, and the railroad is left in terrible shape -- financially and physically. The problem can be fixed, but it will take funding and it will take time."




KCUS Amtrak service is back *by Eric Miller*

The Kansas City Star reported on December 11, 2002, "[New era brings trains back to Union Station.](#)" Amtrak closed its offices there in December 1985 as Pete and Carolyn McMasters purchased the last tickets sold from the then crumbling station. Since then, Kansas City Union Station was restored as part of a science museum at a cost of \$188 million, completed in 1999. The couple was awarded a complimentary ticket for the first train out of Union Station on December 17, 2002, for their support (they've taken 83 long-distance trips during their 49 years of marriage). Amtrak officially celebrated their return on that day with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The \$4.5 million project included a new walkway and boarding platform. On February 1, 1974, Amtrak vacated the similarly crumbling Omaha Burlington Station – their return to the grand structure seems ever more possible now.



Who is Bill Frist? *courtesy of Friends of Amtrak*

U.S. Senator Bill Frist, a Republican from Tennessee, replaces Mississippi Republican Trent Lott as the new Senate Majority Leader. According to records kept by the National Association of Rail Passengers, Frist has voted anti-rail on 6 out of 7 rail related bills in the Senate. Lott, as the former powerful Senate Majority Leader, had a near stellar pro-Amtrak voting record. Lott's departure from this post means that the GOP in the Senate will now be led by an Amtrak foe.

Amtrak supporters can take some comfort in finding Senator Frank Lautenberg back in the Senate. Lautenberg (D-NJ) was often a leader on pro-Amtrak legislation. In contrast to Frist, Lautenberg voted pro-rail 7 out of the 7 times. Lautenberg returns to the Senate replacing Senator Torricelli. 

Remember to take time often to write your Congressman and Senators and let them know about your support for rail passenger service in Nebraska!


Congress set to reauthorize transit programs in 2003 *by Eric Miller*

According to the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (D-MD), Chairman of the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, released a letter to President Bush on December 5, 2002, signed by a bipartisan group of 43 Senators encouraging the Bush Administration to “support America’s public transit systems by ensuring that these systems receive the resources they need to keep America moving.”

The letter was developed in anticipation of the 2003 debate on the reauthorization of the “Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century” (TEA-21), which funds highway and transit programs and will be renamed TEA-3. The Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee has jurisdiction over the transit component of the TEA-21 reauthorization.

“America’s future economic strength depends upon our willingness to make investments in a number of important areas, including our transportation infrastructure,” the Senators wrote to President Bush. “Our nation’s transit systems, in particular, are especially critical to the overall economy. Transit systems in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the country link people to jobs, medical care, shopping, and other essential services.

“We believe that a robust public transportation infrastructure is vital to continuing America’s economic growth. As you develop your reauthorization proposal, we urge you to continue our successful investment in America’s public transportation systems,” the letter concluded.

43 Senators signed the letter, including Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska. TEA-21 is a very popular program to help fund public transportation projects including streetcar systems, light rail transit, commuter rail, and historic railroad depot restorations (the Grand Island “Q” station is a fine example). In fact, so many communities are stepping up to the plate that the TEA-21 Reauthorization Committee is considering increasing state and local government participation and requiring a 50-50 grant match. 

The status of Nebraska’s Amtrak stations *by Eric Miller*

The ProRail Nebraska Board of Directors has been talking a lot about the conditions at each Nebraska Amtrak station over the past fall and has come to some conclusions on what action needs to be taken.

Omaha This is Nebraska’s busiest station with about 30,000 people boarding annually and each California Zephyr stops here for 20 minutes to be refueled and inspected by crews. Agents also sell tickets, check baggage, and load and unload mail and other materials from the Express cars. The station is open daily from 11:00 PM to 8:00 AM the next day. The station is fully packed at many times before the CZ arrives and there is a trailer south of the parking lot and a shed to the west of the station in addition to the standard Amtrak-style 1984 depot. The depot has restrooms, vending machines, taxis are always waiting outside, and parking is free.

Lincoln The California Zephyr stops here 6 minutes each way for crew changes. The depot takes up the northern end of Lincoln Station and was nicely redone in the early 1990s, but is only open from 11:30 PM to 7:00 AM every day of the week except Friday and Saturday nights (the off days change occasionally). On days the station is closed, including frequent times that the only agent is on vacation, passengers can either wait in nearby Iron Horse Park or the hallway of Lincoln Station. The depot has restrooms, taxis are normally on-call, short term parking is at meters near the station, and long-term parking only costs \$1.00 at the lot to the north.

Hastings Amtrak is located in west end of the historic Burlington depot, designed by Thomas Walters Kimball in Spanish architecture, and was fully restored in 2000. The depot is open from 11:00 PM to 7:00 AM with the exception of Wednesday and Thursday nights. On those two nights a caretaker opens the office, but cannot sell tickets, about an hour before the train and it stays open for about four hours. The station has restrooms, vending machines, and free parking.

Holdrege The depot occupies the eastern end of the original station, now called Iron Horse Station. The station is kept up by the Senior Center and is automatically unlocked every night. The depot has restrooms and free parking. The historic Zephyr Café is across the street and is open during the day for hungry passengers.

McCook The depot is in the original station and is basically open all day as there are BNSF train crews coming and going all the time. There are restrooms in the station and free parking.

In conclusion, facilities at all five Nebraska Amtrak stations are at average or above average expectations; however, the Lincoln station is underutilized and provides unacceptable service. Past-President Dan Lutz remarked, “This is an unacceptable situation for a station stop serving a city the size of Lincoln which is a state capital, university town and with a fairly active business community. Lincoln already has ridership well below what it should have.” President Mike Hromanik began writing to NARP last month in hopes of helping resolve the situation. It was decided at the last ProRail Nebraska Board of Directors meeting to write to the involved public officials. NARP is fully behind us in this and Ed Courtemanche and David Gunn have been contacted at Amtrak. Lincoln is now on NARP’s list of stations that they think should be re-examined as to staffing and services (Winona and La Crosse on the Empire Builder were also included). We’re striving to get someone to be at the station every night (to have it open and answer questions, etc.), even if it’s just a caretaker.



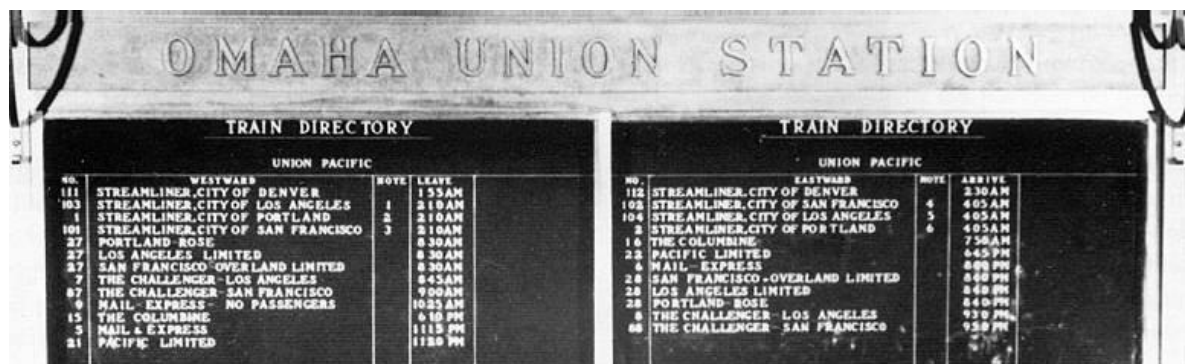
ProRail Nebraska t-shirts?

ProRail Nebraska is considering printing t-shirts to promote our organization and possibly as a fund-raiser. Currently, a poll is being taken on the Yahoo! Groups listserv. We would like to hear your feedback regarding this idea; please send any suggestions to the Acting Editor. Things to consider are: Would you buy a PRN t-shirt if they became available – how much would you pay? What all would you like on the t-shirt – art, a real photo, the ProRail Nebraska logo, a motto or phrase, or something else? And would you want a t-shirt or maybe a sweater instead? The Communications and Public Relations Committee is thinking of having a design chosen in time for the next newsletter with an order form in that newsletter and picture of what the shirt will look like. Shirts would also be sold at the May annual meeting under this time frame – so you would have your ProRail Nebraska t-shirt just in time for summer!

TIMETABLE CHALLENGE

by Mike Hromanik

This is the first of what will hopefully be a continuing feature. The idea arose after seeing



an internet flyer about saving the Southwest Chief and extending the Heartland Flyer to Kansas City. Extending the Heartland Flyer is a great idea for many reasons, one of them being that I have relatives in Oklahoma City! So extending the Flyer got me thinking about our Omaha to Kansas City service and how we could tie all this together. The more I thought about it, the more the advantages of a north-south train connecting up the transcontinental routes became obvious.

So here's the first TIMETABLE CHALLENGE; we need a route, cities served, and a running time for a train running from Minneapolis to Dallas. (Throw in a name too!) The train has to serve its major cities and its interchange layovers at the best possible times. (Remember, layovers can be too short as well as too long!!) Adjusting the times of existing trains is acceptable, but the same rules apply to them also. (Will Amtrak's entire system schedule need to be revised?)

The entries will be judged by a distinguished panel of experts. The winner will receive a nice certificate, as well as a unique but inexpensive prize that will be announced at a later date! (Quite possibly a ProRail Nebraska T-shirt, but we'll just have to wait and see.)

Get those maps and calculators out and your thinking caps on! Please mail your plan to President Mike Hromanik (address on back of newsletter) by February 20, 2003. Entries will be judged by March 20, 2003.



2nd District Special Meeting time change

Make tracks to the ProRail Nebraska Omaha Special Meeting on **January 18th, 2003**, at the **W. Dale Clark Library** in downtown Omaha at 14th and Farnam Street. However, there is one minor change: the meeting will now begin at **3:00 PM**. Omaha members are encouraged to attend, all other members are more than welcome to come, and guests are certainly welcomed as well.

There will be three distinguished guest speakers: **Hal Daub**, Trolley report; **Dan Jensen** (Sioux City Transit Director), Sioux City rail transit presentation; and **Dr. Lyn Kathlene** (UNL professor), Bolder, Colorado transit presentation. Other issues to be covered include: Midwest regional rail update, Heartland Railroad Historical Society update, and recent Amtrak news. Contact Eric Miller at (402)681-5336 or emillerz@yahoo.com for questions or more information.



Group Information



Welcome to new ProRail Nebraska members who have joined as of November!

Kenneth Giespert, McCook
Michael A. Hoenig, Cheyenne, WY
Gerald W. Kopiasz, Omaha
Richard Warner, Council Bluffs, IA

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@yahoogroups.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

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 **March 20, 2002**.

Each quarterly newsletter will feature a photo taken by a ProRail Nebraska member. If you have a recent (approximately last 6 months) 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 with a self addressed stamp envelope sent to the acting editor will be graciously and promptly returned.

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Photo of the Quarter

McCook, Nebraska Amtrak Station at 101 Norris Ave – *by Robert Norman*



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