



ProRail Nebraska News

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N-TRAC Report Submitted to Legislature

By Dave Purdy

The Nebraska Transit and Rail Advisory Council (Ntrac) has submitted its report to the Nebraska legislature and gone out of existence. The report was prepared by Wilbur Smith Associates under a contract with Ntrac.

The report considered a number of transit corridors (Kearney-Omaha, Norfolk-Omaha and Sioux City-Omaha-Nebraska City) and technologies (bus and train) Most of the report was concentrated on train service between Omaha and Lincoln. This discussion will be limited to the Omaha-Lincoln train service.

Most politicians will remember just one number from the report: Cost per new rider. This is a parameter the Federal Government depends on for deciding which projects to fund. The maximum value of cost per new rider which elicits federal funding is \$25 per new rider. The value derived in the report is \$89.72, based on capital investment of \$79,266,000, annual operating and maintenance cost of \$4,958,000 and ridership of 169,634 per year. It can be seen that, based on the Wilbur Smith analysis, there is little chance of federal funding. In the present economy, the State of Nebraska is also not likely

to fund the project.

There are a number of reasons for the high cost per new rider. Most important is the estimate of ridership, that is, the number of people who would use the train. There aren't enough riders to spread the costs over. The ridership of 169,634 per year means that, on the average, only 103 riders are on each workday train. Additional riders were estimated for football specials.

The Wilbur Smith estimate of ridership was crude. It was based in part on extrapolation from a similar service in California. It was also based solely on easily available census data. It ignored students and Council Bluffs patrons. A more detailed analysis might yield more attractive results.

One major problem with the rail service is the "12 axle" rule. This rule is an outcome of the signal system BNSF and other railroads use. The signal system determines train position by a small electrical voltage sent through the tracks. The train axles provide a current path so the electricity can travel out on one rail, cross to the other rail through the train axles, and then return via the other rail. Signal system ex-

perience shows that twelve axles are needed to provide a reliable path. Since each car of a commuter train has four axles, each train must be three cars long.

Each car has seats for 90 people, so a three car train can carry 270. In other words, ridership could almost triple without increasing cost. The cost per new rider would become \$34.21 if all the seats could be filled.

Another way of looking at it is that, if the 12 axle rule did not exist, single car trains could be used and estimated cost per new rider would become about \$68.

The cost estimates made by Wilbur Smith look rather liberal. The maintenance facility is estimated to cost \$ 14.5 million. The sketch in the report shows a facility big enough to contain the entire train fleet inside. I think a facility about one quarter the size of the one proposed would suffice. There are other examples of rather liberal cost estimates.

Regardless of what we might think of the report, it exists and the legislature has it.

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AMTRAK'S NOVEMBER TO REMEMBER

Passengers stuff trains at Thanksgiving

WASHINGTON — Amtrak ended the busiest November in its 32-year history with a ridership total of 2,076,054, up 11.7 percent over last year's total of 1,858,345.

All 16 long-distance trains posted double-digit gains and, collectively, posted a 32 percent surge in ridership. The most impressive gains were realized on the Capitol Limited (Chicago – Pittsburgh – Washington), up 54 percent; the Sunset Limited (Orlando – New Orleans – San Antonio – Los Angeles), up 50 percent; and the Cardinal (Chicago – Indianapolis – New York), up 51 percent due to a route extension from Washington to New York City. Regional trains in the Northeast, which account more than 25 percent of Amtrak ridership, posted a 15 percent gain over last November.

During the seven-day Thanksgiving travel period (Tuesday, Nov. 25 – Monday, Dec. 1), approximately 595,000 passengers stepped aboard Amtrak trains, making it the busiest week in Amtrak history. Thanksgiving ridership was up nine percent over last year and up five percent over the previous Thanksgiving record set in 2000 when ridership was 566,759.

The increases were attributed to an improving travel market and to Amtrak's "back-to-basics" approach to running the railroad. Among the recent initiatives under the back-to-basics approach are a new advertising campaign coupled with fare rollbacks, incentives for online booking, and a commitment to upgrading equipment and infrastructure to improve reliability.

As it has in past years, Amtrak took extraordinary steps to meet the increased travel demand around Thanksgiving: A total of 60,000 seats and 77 trains were added nationwide. In the Northeast, Amtrak operated on a special Thanksgiving schedule that provided more frequent service and required reservations to ensure that virtually every passenger had a comfortable seat. On the West Coast, Amtrak added eight trains to Cascades service between Portland and Seattle and went to "all-reserved" status to minimize standing-room conditions on the Pacific Surfliners between San Diego and Los Angeles.

November FY04	Ridership		% Change vs. FY03
	FY04	FY03	
Short Distance			
1/2 - Acela/Metroliner	262,997	239,011	+10.0
3 - Ethan Allen	9,044	8,840	+2.3
4 - Vermonter	23,196	23,435	-1.0
5 - Regional	559,337	487,232	+14.8
9 - Downeaster	21,275	19,501	+9.1
13 - Clocker	147,204	159,970	-8.0
14 - Keystone	75,814	74,566	+1.7
15 - Empire	91,657	86,206	+6.3
20 - Chicago-St. Louis	17,101	13,639	+25.4
21 - Hiawatha	38,443	33,380	+15.2
22 - Wolverine	29,952	22,294	+34.4
23 - Illini	9,592	8,428	+13.8
24 - Illinois Zephyr	9,192	7,806	+17.8
29 - Heartland Flyer	3,642	2,980	+22.2
35 - Pacific Surfliner	176,572	161,684	+9.2
36 - Cascades	48,391	47,862	+1.1
37 - Capitols	93,409	92,765	+0.7
39 - San Joaquins	61,386	58,673	+4.6
40 - Adirondack	9,692	9,729	-0.4
41 - International	7,325	6,055	+21.0
54 - Hoosier State	1,350	1,070	+26.2
56 - Kansas City-St. Louis	9,763	8,858	+10.2
57 - Pennsylvanian	13,769	5,547	+148.2
65 - Pere Marquette	6,994	5,607	+24.7
66 - Carolinian	23,834	24,164	-1.4
67 - Piedmont	4,343	3,441	+26.2
96/99 - Special Trains	4,415	5,966	-26.0
Short Distance Total	1,759,689	1,618,709	+8.7

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Editorial: Equipment Attrition-Amtrak's Hidden Decay

By Michael Hromanik

How do you operate a railroad when you don't have any cars left? That question has significant importance to Amtrak's long distance train network, including the California Zephyr.

It has been 8 years since the last Superliner and Viewliners were delivered. In that time there has been a steady decrease in Amtrak's rolling stock through derailments, collisions, retirements, and a simple lack of replacement parts. That decrease was exacerbated by the policy of previous Amtrak Administrations to not repair wreck and derailment damaged equipment.

The result has forced Amtrak to "Rob Peter to Pay Paul." A contributing factor for the cancellation of the "Pioneer" and "Desert Wind" was the need to dis-

tribute that equipment to other trains. The recent derailment of the Auto-Train resulted in replacement equipment being taken from numerous long distance trains.

David Gunn has at least changed the repair policy, beginning repair work on equipment that in some cases has sat for 10 years.

But those repairs will only slow the attrition. Even if Amtrak receives full operational funding from now on, without new equipment, trains will slowly shorten, eventually dwindling into nothing.

This could serve as a "backdoor" strategy to end long distance rail service. This obviously must not be allowed to happen. Amtrak management has to com-

pletely change the "spin" of the long distance train as nurtured by previous Amtrak administrations. That spin being that "Long Distance Trains are an Albacross around Amtrak's Neck and "The long Distance Train only exists to maintain Nationwide Support for Funding the Northeast Corridor."

The fact of the matter is that long distance trains have Amtrak's highest occupancy rates, with passenger's traveling an average of 800 miles. Long distance trains share the expense of the rails with freight trains, just as semi-trucks rely on the automobile to provide the majority of funding the highway system.

It is in Amtrak's best interest to have a thriving long distance rail system. The acquisition of new equipment for long distance service should be an equal priority to new equipment acquisition on the northeast corridor.

"Even if Amtrak receives full operational funding from now on, without new equipment, the service will dwindle to nothing. "

Joint Omaha Rail Conference on February 7th

Joint Omaha Rail Conference

Saturday, February 7, 2004, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Meeting will be held at the Union Pacific Room at the Creighton University library. The conference will be divided into two sessions: Heartland Railroad Historical Society from 10:00-11:30 and ProRail Nebraska from 1:30-3:00. Lunch will be at Spaghetti

Works in downtown Omaha from 12:00-1:00. Speakers for HRRHS may include the director of the Fairbury Rock Island Depot Museum or the director of the UP Museum in Council Bluffs. Speakers for ProRail Nebraska may include a representative from the downtown Business Improvement District, Steve Anderson of Heartland Gondolas, and will

include Clyde Anderson of the Sierra Club. Topics include the Omaha Burlington Station, Burlington Committee, Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Omaha Streetcar Study, Riverfront Trolley idea, Commuter Rail update, and local Amtrak issues. Contact Gerald Kopiasz 402-598-6641 (HRRHS) or Eric Miller 402-681-5336 (ProRail)

Midwest Airlines Connects With Amtrak

As Reported in the Chicago Tribune By Melissa Allison, Tribune staff reporter

January 13, 2004

After more than a decade, Midwest Airlines finally is getting the Amtrak station it hopes will bring more Chicago-area passengers to Milwaukee, where it is the largest carrier.

By this time next year, customers from Chicago's northern suburbs should be able to hop on a train in Glenview and arrive just outside Gen. Mitchell International Airport about 45 minutes later. A train ticket is expected to run between \$15 and \$20.

The idea for an Amtrak station at the airport came from executives at Milwaukee-based Midwest Airlines about 13 years ago. The \$6.5 million in federal funding to get the job done came in legislation over the past two years.

Midwest Airlines, which has undergone substantial changes over the past year to stay afloat, hopes the station will be as appealing to North Shore residents as Midway International Airport on Chicago's Southwest Side. Chicagoans wanting to fly out of Milwaukee also will be able to board Amtrak in downtown Chicago.

Midwest generates more than 6 percent of its customers from northern Illinois.

Now, Midwest executives want to generate revenue partly by negotiating a deal with Amtrak that would allow customers to use one ticket for their rail and air travel.

"It's a pretty slick way to make your itinerary," said Randy Smith, Midwest's head of sales and distribution. The airline allows customers to use their Amtrak travel for frequent-flier miles.

Currently, Amtrak shares tickets with Continental Airlines passengers flying in and out of Newark, N.J. Customers are able to use one ticket for their entire trip and receive frequent-flier miles for their rail travel, but they are not able to check their bags all the way through, said Continental spokesman Rahsaan Johnson.

"It would have been almost impossible logistically," Johnson said, particularly because airports have more stringent security measures than train stations.

The Newark station, which opened in October 2001, was meant to ease travel between Newark and New York City. But the code-

share with Amtrak also attracts a few dozen Continental passengers each day coming from and going to Philadelphia; Wilmington, Del.; and Stamford and New Haven, Conn., Johnson said.

Ron Adams, director of Wisconsin's bureau of railroads and harbors, estimates that the new station will add about 20,000 rail passengers each year to the 420,000 customers who travel the Milwaukee/Chicago route.

By making use of Rail Transportation, Chicago got its "3rd Airport" for \$6.5 million, not \$6.5 billion.



Texas Toll Road to be Auctioned Off

As Reported by the Associated Press, December 19th, 2003

The only private toll road in Texas is being sold in foreclosure. The \$90 million dollar, 22 mile road, was developed with the intent to draw traffic from the public highways crossing the border at Laredo Texas.

The toll road originally opened in October 2000 and charged \$3 per car and

\$16 per semi-truck.

Unfortunately for the numerous investors, such as local landowners who invested \$15 million and New York Life Insurance Company's \$75 million, traffic was only at 13% of expectations. While the road had reasonable car traffic, it was never able to attract the truckers from the congested public highways. (Congestion appears to be worth less than \$16.)

A private toll road in Virginia has also struggled financially. The owners of the Dulles Greenway were forced to borrow millions of dollars to refinance the project in 1999 because of traffic volumes that were short of projections.

Is the Nation's highway system truly self-sustaining if toll roads built by the private sector fail financially? When drivers are given the choice of actually paying for the true cost of a new highway, what choice do they make?

ProRail Nebraska General Membership Meeting February 21st.

ProRail Nebraska General Membership Meeting

Saturday, February 21, 2004, 1:00 - 4:00 PM. Meeting will be held at the Plumb Street Station in Grand Island. Members can stick around and attend in plenty of time to get to the Plum Street Station in Grand Island for the Great

Plains NRHS Chapter dinner later that evening. Topics may include Omaha Burlington Station developments, statewide Amtrak issues, Commuter Rail update, report on Denver Light Rail Conference, and others to be determined. Registration cost per person for the day will be \$10 including lunch or \$3 for

just the afternoon session.

Proposed Schedule:
10 am to 11:30 : PRN Board Meeting
12 noon - 1 pm: catered lunch in the depot
1 pm - 4 pm : PRN general membership meeting (we need to be done in the depot by 4:30, so that the Great Plains NRHS can set up for the evening

Optional: 5 pm - 6 pm: registration for NRHS meeting/banquet (Any PRN member may attend, contact Roger for info, cost is \$15)
6 pm: banquet

Contact
Eric Miller 402-681-5336 or
Tom Brewer 402-744-4761
for more information.

NARP Region 10 Meeting March 13th

The National Association of Railroad Passengers will hold their Region 10 in Osceola, Iowa on Saturday, March 13th.

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".....

Mickey Mylar's Time-Share Sleeping Car By Michael Hromanik

Mickey Mylar dreams of trains. Comparatively well off, Mickey's 8 kids are grown and out of the house. He's drifting, daydreaming, looking for that something to spark that fire that has driven him throughout his life. Mickey's loving wife, Meredith, leaves him be. She knows how he gets; How distracted and removed he is while that little thing in the back of his mind is slowly working its way to the front. She's seen it many times before.

Mickey's mind revolves. What is it? What is that long, distant thought, that pleasant idea, whose time has come? Building an ocean going yacht in the backyard garage has serious limitations. The garage being located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, being one of the main ones. Certainly something to rent someday perhaps, but not build and own. What would I do with it when I'm not using it? It certainly wouldn't be used much. What about that dream cabin with the flagstone fireplace and the cedar walls? Still a wonderful idea. But that would be another home, another part of me. How could that sit empty 90% of the time? Who would you trust to stay there?

What was that thing in his mind? A periodic adventure that could be left alone or trusted with others? Things focused. What about a train? What about a passenger car? Could he buy one? No he couldn't. He was only "comparatively" well off. And you can't build a passenger car like a boat or a cabin. But Mickey couldn't shake this idea. This had the spark. Perhaps he could own part of a passenger car? Yes, maybe. Surely others were like himself. Share the ownership!! That's it!! Organize a group. Buy a sleeping car!! Share the car!!

But what car? Mickey periodically traveled by train, but had only rarely ever seen a private car. When he had it was at the very end behind a boxcar or butted up against a superliner, totally inaccessible. Mickey really enjoyed eating in the dining car and walking the train. "The train's the only transportation system left that you can still move about in." Who wants to be trapped at the back of the train? Our train car would have to be high-level, an old Santa Fe Hi-Level. Better yet, a old Santa Fe Hi-Level transition car!! He would solve the access problem for everybody!!

To Be Continued.....



Group Warns of Increased Congestion on Freight Railroads

As reported by Reuters, 12.15.03, 4:30 PM ET

By John Crawley

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A government transportation watchdog warned Monday of increasing congestion on the nation's rail networks, saying some routes cannot safely support growing passenger and freight demand.

Rail traffic has increased 64 percent since 1980 with strong growth forecast through 2020, according to a freight and passenger industry audit by Kenneth Mead, the Transportation Department inspector general.

More traffic combined with a steady decline in track miles and continued reductions in railroad staff to save money aggravates already crowded conditions, industry officials said.

"Despite railroads' investments, certain parts of the railroad system have become severely congested and cannot accommodate the conflicting demands of both increasing freight movement and increasing commuter and (Amtrak) traffic," Mead said.

The audit found that numerous infrastructure bottlenecks are magnifying the problem. They include undersized bridges and tunnels, track design limits, and outmoded communications systems.

While Mead did not say which routes were less able to handle their loads, a government-industry analysis in 2002 showed the mid-Atlantic region was facing a capacity crisis. In Chicago, industry and government are working on a plan to untangle acute congestion around that city. Texas and California also have crowded routes, industry officials said.

Amtrak, the nation's only city-to-city passenger rail service, plans to spend more than \$460 million on capital projects during the current fiscal year, which runs through Sept. 30. Priorities include bridge and tunnel upgrades on its Northeast Corridor system between Washington and Boston.

But Amtrak runs 70 percent of its operations on tracks owned and maintained by freight railroads.

Amtrak offers these companies millions of dollars an-

nually to ensure that passenger trains can negotiate freight traffic to meet their schedules. But Mead said two freight companies in fiscal 2002 passed up a combined \$37 million in Amtrak incentive payments. They told government auditors the money was not worth the cost of adjusting freight schedules and other operations to accommodate passenger service.

Cliff Black, an Amtrak spokesman, said freight rail reluctance to take Amtrak incentive payments was not a "nefarious plan" to disrupt passenger service.

"It's an endemic problem that resides in the railroads themselves. They have difficulty getting their own trains over the road," Black said.

"More traffic combined with a steady decline in track miles and continued reductions in railroad staff to save money aggravates already crowded conditions, industry officials said."



Amtrak has Record Year (Continued from Page 2)

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Long Distance	FY03	FY04	% Change vs. FY03
16 - Silver Star	23,508	15,811	+48.7
17 - Three Rivers	12,085	8,239	+46.7
18 - Cardinal	7,337	4,866	+50.8
19 - Silver Meteor	24,455	18,461	+32.5
25 - Empire Builder	33,574	23,700	+41.7
26 - Capitol Ltd.	13,722	8,901	+54.2
27 - California Zephyr	25,797	19,189	+34.4
28 - Southwest Chief	21,249	15,159	+40.2
30 - City of New Orleans	15,603	13,024	+19.8
32 - Texas Eagle	19,064	13,135	+45.1
33 - Sunset Ltd.	8,589	5,725	+50.0
34 - Coast Starlight	36,084	31,907	+13.1
45 - Lake Shore Ltd.	21,882	16,830	+30.0
48 - Palmetto	17,792	13,195	+34.8
52 - Crescent	21,148	18,475	+14.5
63 - Auto Train	14,476	13,019	+11.2
Long Distance Total	316,365	239,636	+32.0
Amtrak Total	2,076,054	1,858,345	+11.7



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