



ProRail Nebraska News

Dedicated to supporting and advocating for railroad service in the State of Nebraska

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Volume XXVI

May 2016

ProRail Nebraska Annual Meeting

Saturday, May 21, 2016 – 9:00 am to 11:30 am – Omaha, NE

Where: Second Unitarian Church of Omaha, 3012 South 119th St. – Southwest corner of Westwood Lane & 119th St. From 120th & West Center Road proceed two blocks south on 120th St. to Westwood Lane, turn left (east), proceed east on Westwood Lane one block to 119th St., turn right (south) and the church is on your right. Parking is available on the south side of the church. **By Bus:** Take OMetro Route 15 to 120th & Center and walk three blocks. Go to <http://www.ometro.com/> for schedules.

Time: 9:00 am to 11:30 am (*Refreshments - 8:30am*)

Tentative Agenda:

- 8:30 am - Registration and refreshments
- 9:00 am - Welcome and Introductions by PRN President Matt Roque
- 9:10 am - Nebraska Legislative Update by Matt Roque, PRN Lobbyist
- 9:30 am - Report on MIPRC Information Meeting with Nebraska Legislators by Bob Kuzelka (State Senators Burke Harr, District 8, and Brent Lindstrum, District 18, invited)
- 9:50 am – Omaha’s Dodge Street Bus Rapid Transit Project – Lauren Cencic, Omaha Metro
- 10:30 am - Break
- 10:45 am - Citizen’s for Improved Public Transit – PRN Involvement by Richard Schmeling
- 11:00 am - NE Dept. of Roads Statewide Mobility Management Study by Richard Schmeling
- 11:15 am - ProRail Business - Secretary and Treasurer reports, election of officers
- 11:30 am - Adjourn

Registration: Free! Advance registration appreciated so we will have enough refreshments.

To register or for more information call Clyde Anderson (402) 740-5556 (Omaha) email ClydeLAnderson@cox.net or Bob Kuzelka (402) 417-9424 (Lincoln) email rkuzelka1@unl.edu.

Please join us on May 21st to better understand why we feel so strongly that Nebraska must become an active participant in the future of passenger rail travel.

ProRail Nebraska Election of Officers at May 21st Meeting

The Board has nominated the following slate of candidates for officers to be elected May 21st for 2-year terms:

Vice-President - Robert Kuzelka (incumbent)	District 2 Director – Clyde Anderson (incumbent)
Secretary – Morrie Tuttle (incumbent)	District 4 Director – Jim Hanna (incumbent)

ProRail - Your Voice Before the Nebraska Legislature

Our ProRail Lobbyists, Matt Roque and Bob Kuzelka, have been busy this winter presenting ProRail's position on several transportation bills and issues before the Nebraska Legislature. At its January 16 meeting, the ProRail Board decided to take positions on the following bills:



- **LB 735 - Provide a length limit exception for an articulated bus vehicle operated by a transit authority** -- ProRail supports this bill because it would authorize transit agencies to use articulated buses up to 65-ft. in length like those planned for Omaha's new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). This bill was signed by the Governor and became law on March 9, 2016.
- **LB 799 - Include capital acquisition costs in the Nebraska Public Transportation Act's assistance program** -- PRN decided to support this bill because we believe that improved public transportation is vital to the economic viability, health, and environment of both urban and rural Nebraska. Many Nebraskans don't have access to motor vehicles for their transportation needs, especially the elderly and young, and must rely on public transportation, family and friends, or charities to meet their transport needs. LB 799 would extend State assistance to public transportation to capital investments like new vehicles and maintenance facilities. The bill remains in committee and was "indefinitely postponed" for this session.
- **LB 977 – Original LB related to operation of implements of husbandry on highways was amended to become an omnibus transportation LB which included the provisions of LB 799 in Sections 1, 2 and 3.** PRN did not have a position on the original LB but supported it in its amended form. The bill became a priority bill for the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee, was advanced by that committee to the General File on March 2, was passed in its amended form to include PRN supported provisions of LB 799 by the Legislature on April 12 and signed by the Governor on April 18.
- **LB 960 - Adopt the Transportation Innovation Act** -- This bill would divert \$150 million from the Cash Reserve Fund to the new Transportation Infrastructure Bank Fund and divert over \$28 million from the Cash Reserve Fund to the new Nebraska Capital Construction Fund. Since funding would primarily go to build and maintain roads, **PRN was opposed to this bill** unless more money was guaranteed for other modes of transportation. The bill was Sen. Brasch's priority bill, advanced by Appropriations Committee to General File on March 9, was passed by the Legislature and was signed by the Governor on April 18.
- **LB192 - Require a train crew of at least two individuals** -- This is a carryover bill from the 2015 Session, and ProRail decided to support the bill if a hearing is scheduled. No action was taken on this bill, and it will likely be reintroduced in the 2017 Session.

Although there is no legislation this session dealing with Nebraska's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact (MIPRC), ProRail sponsored an informational luncheon for senators at the State Capitol on February 23rd. The event was hosted by Nebraska's two Legislative Appointed Compact Commissioners, Senators Burke Harr (District 8) and Brent Lindstrom (District 18). SMART/UTU (United Transportation Union) was a co-sponsor for the event with PRN.

Senators and staff attending were provided the current status of the State of Nebraska in the MIPRC, and Laura Kliewer, MIPRC Director, gave a brief history of the Compact. Kansas State Senator Carolyn McGinn told how Kansas and other member states benefit from the MIPRC. Senator Harr also related his

experience at the MIPRC spring 2015 federal delegation meeting in Washington, D.C. ProRail President Matt Roque then presented our Position Paper on the State of Nebraska and MIPRC.

The luncheon was attended by 6 senators and staff members from 17 State Senators' offices, and their responses were generally favorable towards the MIPRC.

New Routes and Schedules for Lincoln's StarTran

By Dick Schmeling, PRN Director – District 1

At its March 14th meeting the Lincoln City Council approved a revised Preferred Alternative which included a number of changes made by StarTran and the consultant Nelson Nygaard. These changes were made at the insistence of council members and were based upon input from Citizens For Improved Transit and from other members of the public who appeared at four quadrant public meetings in January of 2016.

The plan finally approved was a significant improvement over the initial plan submitted. Most importantly the council indicated that it would seek additional funding for StarTran in the upcoming 2016-2018 budget so that future recommended changes, known as Phase 1 through Phase 5, could be implemented now rather than over the next several years.

It will be recalled that the original recommendation for changes was handcuffed by the provision in the contract with the consulting firm that the recommendations had to be based upon the assumption that StarTran would receive the same amount in the new budget as it did in the 2015 budget. Funding for StarTran has been level for the past several years which has not allowed service expansion.

Citizens For Improved Transit is satisfied that its efforts bore fruit and that without its awakening of the city council and the public to the update of the Transportation Development Plan, Lincoln would continue to have poor city bus service.

The Push for Autonomous Cars Threatens Amtrak, Commuter Rail and Bus Public Transit

By Dick Schmeling, PRN Director – District 1

A push by Google, car manufacturers and the Cato Institute threatens to halt expansion of progress made in recent years to upgrade Amtrak, quash regional rail projects like MIPRC, halt Light Rail and Commuter Rail new starts and decimate city bus transit systems.

On March 21, 2016, Google presented a proposal to the U.S. Department of Transportation that definitions



(continued from page 3)

in its regulations be modified to permit Google to market autonomous cars which have no human driver over-ride controls like a steering wheel, and brake and accelerator pedals. The cars will be controlled exclusively by onboard computers.

This move comes in spite of many instances where Google engineered cars being tested with human drivers aboard and over-ride controls have frequently required the humans to take over to avoid accidents. The technology is flawed in that sensors aboard the cars are adversely effected by snow, rain, fog and even shine back from wet pavement. The cars don't function as designed because their sensors are "fooled".

Google admitted that on Valentines Day this year a Google car crashed into the side of a transit bus. The car had sensed objects in the road ahead as the car approached a construction project in its lane. Its rear camera detected the transit bus approaching in the adjacent lane but failed to realize that the speed of the bus would bring it alongside the car. The Google car moved into the occupied lane and struck the side of the transit bus.

In a test of the new technology one of the robot cars found a woman in a motorized wheelchair holding a broom and chasing a duck across the roadway. The car's reaction was to follow the woman and the duck, whereupon the procession did a series of figure eights in the roadway and then all of them went off the side of the road!

The Cato Institute is an ultra-conservative think tank financed by sponsors which include car manufacturers, big oil companies, tire manufacturers and auto suppliers. It had previously published a position paper calling for defunding Amtrak.

Its long white paper recently released about autonomous cars concludes that when the robot cars are in use the need for public transportation will evaporate except in New York City. It states, "Congress should stop funding expensive and obsolete rail transit projects, which will have no place in a future likely to be characterized by widespread sharing of self-driving cars." It further urges that Congress mandate that long-range planning requirements be dropped because the autonomous vehicles will make such planning obsolete and "will impose obsolete systems and designs on their regions."

The motivation for the Google and Cato Institute initiative can be found in the fact that new car sales have been lagging recently due to the transit revolution throughout the United States and the observed result that many millennials (those born between 1981 and 1997) are not buying cars and instead using public transportation in order to save money to pay off student loans, save for a down payments for purchasing housing, or simply not wanting to deal with the congestion on the streets and roads. Car ownership among 19 to 35 year olds has dropped from about 93% in 1980 to about 72% today.

Another factor impacting car sales is that in many urban areas congestion remains in spite of massive investment in new roadways. The maximum flow per hour per lane of traffic with conventional autos is about 1,800 vehicles per hour. Highway space is not densely used because of the spacing between vehicles. It is urged that autonomous cars can follow one another more closely without the danger of rear-enders and will allow more vehicles on the existing roadways.

The attack on planning is because urban planners in progressive cities like Portland use transportation-based zoning which concentrates denser dwellings along transit corridors and decreases the need for people to drive.

ProRail Nebraska members should be aware of this initiative because of the possible impact upon rail passenger and city transit and should actively oppose this push. The technology is flawed, not yet mature and poses risks to the public if widely implemented on a crash basis.

Little consideration has been given to the ability of hackers to "lock up" controls on cars currently on the road with minicomputers controlling a lot of functions. Recently hackers caused Jeep Cherokees to lose steering and braking. The effect of solar flares and other electromagnetic pulses on the vehicles also has not been dealt with.

There are big bucks involved in this initiative, and ProRail should not discount this as harmless to other forms of transportation.

Omaha Bus Rapid Transit to Start October 20, 2018



On Friday, February 19, [Mode Shift Omaha's](#) monthly Coffee Chat forum in Downtown Omaha featured Lauren Cencic, [Omaha Metro Transit's](#) Project Manager of Bus Rapid Transit. Lauren provided the following updates on Omaha's BRT Project:

- The BRT will use 60-ft CNG (compressed natural gas) articulated buses, but the buses haven't been ordered yet. The infrastructure to support CNG (i.e., fueling stations) is being subsidized with grants from the Metropolitan Utilities District and the Nebraska Environmental Trust.
- The BRT route on Dodge Street east of 30th St. will include dedicated transit lanes on both sides of the street. Only buses, not cars, will operate eastbound on Dodge on this segment.
- In designing station stops (see the map above), O-Metro will favor far-side stops -- locating the stops on the far side of the intersection. This not only speeds up traffic, but eliminates the hazard of passengers walking in front of the bus to cross the street.
- The BRT will have traffic light pre-emptive control to speed the movement of buses in the corridor.
- The BRT will use a pre-pay fare system so passengers don't pay their fares on the bus. This allows fast "flood" loading and unloading at stations where passengers can board at any door on the bus. There will be fare card machines at the stations and fare inspectors making random fare payment enforcement.
- Stations will be approximately 80 ft. long by 12 ft. wide, but this will vary with location. Stations will all feature shelters, and many will have facilities for bicycle parking/storage.
- There will be bicycle racks inside the buses, and several designs are being studied.
- Local non-BRT buses will probably not use the BRT stops but rather nearby local bus stops for easy transfers.
- The Westroads Shopping Center has been favorable to expanded commuter parking near the Westroads Transit Center.
- Mode Shift Omaha has representation on the Omaha BRT Stakeholders Committee.
- Operations are scheduled to begin on October 20, 2018.

Kansas City streetcar to open in May

Progressive Railroading, February 26, 2016



The Kansas City Streetcar Authority yesterday announced that the KC Streetcar system will open May 6. The two-mile route will primarily run along Main Street in downtown Kansas City and connect the River Market area to Crown Center and Union Station. The KC Streetcar has 16 stops spaced every two blocks for both northbound and southbound travel, according to the project's website. "This is the first step of what I believe will be a truly historic transformation of the entire city," said Kansas City Mayor Sly James in a press release. "Building owners and developers have completed, started or announced more than \$1.6 billion in construction in the KC Streetcar district since the route was announced three years ago."

ProRail Nebraska
7020 Burt St.
Omaha NE 68132-2600

Annual Meeting Sat. May 21st

ProRail Nebraska's Annual Meeting will be in Omaha on Saturday, May 21, at 9:00 am (refreshments at 8:30 am). The general public is welcome!

Where: Second Unitarian Church of Omaha,
3012 South 119th St. – Southwest corner of
Westwood Lane & 119th St.

See page 1 for details.

For more information, contact Clyde Anderson (402) 740-5556 (Omaha)
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