



# ProRail Nebraska News

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

Visit our web site at <http://www.trainweb.org/prorailnebraska/>

Volume XXVI

November 2016

## Next ProRail Nebraska Meeting

**Saturday, December 10, 2016 – 9:00 am – Lincoln, NE**

**Where:** St. Marks Episcopal Church on the Campus, 13th & R Streets, Lincoln, NE

**Time:** 9:00am (Doors open about 8:30 am)

### **Tentative Agenda Topics**

- Report on the MIPRC Annual Meeting in St. Louis by Bob Kuzelka
- Review, Discuss & Update PRN Objectives last revised in January 2015 (see page 4)
- Legislative plans and priorities for the 2017 Session of the Nebraska Legislature
- Update on improvements to Lincoln's StarTran Transit System and other state transit issues
- ProRail Business - Secretary and Treasurer reports
- Adjourn

For more information call Bob Kuzelka (402) 417-9424 (Lincoln) email [rkuzelka1@unl.edu](mailto:rkuzelka1@unl.edu) or Clyde Anderson (402) 740-5556 (Omaha) email [ClydeLAnderson@cox.net](mailto:ClydeLAnderson@cox.net).

*Please join us on December 10th to better understand why we feel so strongly that Nebraska must become an active participant in the future of passenger rail travel.*

### **Directions to Reach the December 10th Meeting**

**MEETING LOCATION:** St. Marks Episcopal Church on the Campus, 13th & R Streets, Lincoln, NE. Take O Street to 13<sup>th</sup>, turn north on 13<sup>th</sup> and proceed three blocks to the church. See map on page 8.

**PARKING INSTRUCTIONS:** Parking should not be a problem on this non-football Saturday but it will cost. The UNL lot to the east of the church has guest meters plus there are city meters on the streets but usually for only 90 minutes. Remember to bring change! You can also park in the LARSEN Building lot which is south of the church across "Q" Street (850 Q St.) for \$1.00/hr.

### **It's Almost Membership Renewal Time**

*If you are a ProRail Nebraska member, please watch for your membership renewal letter which will be mailed in late November. If you would like to become a member, please send a check for \$20 (more is always welcome!) to Morrie Tuttle, ProRail Nebraska Secretary, 1910 Lake St., Lincoln NE 68502-3816 or call Morrie at (402) 435-5454 for more membership information.*

## ProRail Represents Nebraska at MIPRC Annual Meeting

St. Louis, MO (originating in Chicago)

September 27 through 29, 2016

Submitted by Bob Kuzelka ([rkuzelka1@unl.edu](mailto:rkuzelka1@unl.edu))

The meeting began in Chicago with a brief tour of renovations underway at Union Station, and a ride on Amtrak's [Texas Eagle](#) (Chicago-San Antonio, Texas) to St. Louis. Aboard the train, commissioners, partners and allies heard about – and saw – ongoing work to upgrade the Chicago-St. Louis corridor to 110-mph service between Joliet and Alton by the end of 2017 or early 2018. They also received an update from Amtrak, with a special emphasis on state-supported routes.



*Participants in the MIPRC Annual Meeting at Kirkwood, MO Depot*

The St. Louis portion of the meeting included a half-day trip on the state-supported [Missouri River Runner](#) to Kirkwood for a tour of that city's historic station (see photo, below) and presentations on how the city has embraced the station as both a gateway and popular civic space/downtown anchor; and on the success of the Missouri River Runner service and the [Missouri Passenger Rail Advisory Committee](#) (MORPAC).

Commissioners spent Wednesday afternoon and all of Thursday at the St. Louis City Center hotel hearing and discussing presentations from the MIPRC states on the status of their passenger rail programs/activities, along with reviews of MIPRC's past-year activities and the pending Midwest regional rail planning project with the Federal Railroad Administration. They also reviewed the Universities and Colleges Passenger Rail Survey and discussed steps to follow up on its findings and recommendations. Other topics included updates on federal passenger rail-related legislation and rulings, the Next Generation Equipment Committee and the status of new equipment coming to the Midwest.

Commission business included election of commission officers for FY 2017: Tim Hoeffner, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation's Office of Rail (and Governor Snyder's designee to the commission) as MIPRC's chair; Joan Bray, Missouri Gov. Nixon's designee to the commission, as vice chair; and Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn as financial officer.

MIPRC Annual Meeting Attendance: All of the MIPRC member states were present with appointed members except Nebraska. Elected official members were there from Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota and Wisconsin. Nebraska and the non-member states of Iowa and Ohio had representation by partners or allies.

Member State Reports:

- Illinois – The meeting started with a Amtrak trip and on board presentation about the planning, work and progress on the Chicago- St. Louis hi-speed project
- Indiana – Work on Chicago to Indianapolis route
- Kansas – Completion of \$1 million in state funds for reconditioning of BNSF/AMTRAK line in western KA to insure that line is not relocated by AMTRAK south into OK and TX
- Michigan – Report on three passenger routes result in 10 round trips daily to MI destinations originating in Chicago
- Minnesota – Work on state rail plan
- Missouri – Status of Missouri River Runner route related to tourism and intermodal cooperation with adjacent hike/bike trails; included train trip to Kirkwood and historic restored and reused station and on Missouri Passenger Rail Advisory Committee
- North Dakota – Work on state rail plan due in 2016 and economic value of existing Amtrak service to state
- Wisconsin – Need for Amtrak service though Madison

Major Agenda Items:

*Federal Update*

- AMTRAK presentation by Derrick James and Jim Brzezinski about AMTRAK's developing strategic plan and promotional advertising; relations with on-line communities; discussed AMTRAK contractual relations with connecting bus lines; emphasis on state-supported routes.
- FRA's Midwest Multi State Rail Planning Project was not discussed to any length and only one FRA staff was in attendance.

*MIPRC Activities and Actions*

- Results of survey of students in colleges and universities on AMTRAK lines – questioned how institutions contacted and got cool “we can talk later” from Laura.
- Priorities are federal funding for long distance trains, continuation and development of intercity lines and create a dedicated source of federal funding.
- Report of the Next Generation Equipment Committee and status of new equipment coming to the Midwest.



Copies of presentations and handouts from the meeting can be found at the MIPRC web site at: <http://miprc.org/Activities/Current-Activities>



## ProRail Nebraska (PRN) Statement of Mission and Objectives Revised and Adopted January 10, 2015

**Our Mission** - PRN is a member organization advocating for improved passenger rail transportation serving Nebraska. It is an affiliate of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), which advocates passenger rail service on a national basis. Our priority objectives are:

1. **MIPRC** - Nebraska is a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC), an association made up of officials and citizens appointed by the Governors and Legislatures of the member states (10) in the Midwest. Nebraska's representatives include two State Senators and two public representatives. MIPRC's purpose is to coordinate development of passenger rail service in the several Midwest states. PRN advocates that Nebraska's legislative and executives branches take full and active participation in MIPRC. Such participation should include but not be limited to appointing a full contingent (4) of representatives from Nebraska to the commission and the continuation of paying the state's annual membership dues (\$15,000) to the commission.
2. **OMA/LNK Commuter** - The urban region of Lincoln and Omaha contain the major population centers and growth in Nebraska. PRN advocates establishing commuter public transportation service including commuter trains for this Omaha/Lincoln urban region. The State of Nebraska needs to restudy the feasibility for such commuter service.
3. **NE-CHI Service** - The State of Iowa's DOT is designing the establishment of a second Chicago – Iowa train service which would be routed through Des Moines and would terminate in Omaha/Council Bluffs. PRN advocates that this line be established to include service through Omaha terminating in Lincoln. We encourage the State of Nebraska and the cities of Omaha and Lincoln actively participate in this Iowa DOT project to insure such a Nebraska termination.
4. **NDST** - Until there is a significant and identifiable passenger rail organization in Nebraska state government, efforts to improve and increase passenger rail service in the state will not occur. PRN advocates for the creation of a Nebraska Department of Surface Transportation with a clear function to plan, develop, and implement passenger rail service.
5. **Stations** - PRN advocates for the expansion of the use and accessibility of the AMTRAK stations in the state as hubs for all surface public and private passenger transportation systems.
6. **CA Zephyr** - The AMTRAK California Zephyr is an impressive train, but it operates only once a day at night with east and west service through Nebraska. PRN advocates for additional daylight AMTRAK passenger service between Chicago and Denver through Lincoln and Omaha. We encourage the State of Nebraska and the cities of Omaha and Lincoln to actively participate in and support such increased service.
7. **OMA/LNK to KC** - PRN advocates for the creation of a passenger rail line from Omaha and Lincoln to Kansas City. The states of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri currently are studying and undertaking a passenger line that would connect Dallas-Fort Worth through Oklahoma City/Tulsa and Newton, KS to Kansas City. We encourage the State of Nebraska and the cities of Omaha and Lincoln to actively support and participate in this project to include its extension to Nebraska.

**Megabus to end its Omaha-to-Chicago route**, Omaha World-Herald Saturday, November 12, 2016  
The discount bus company Megabus will make its last trips between Omaha and Chicago on Jan. 9. The company said it is ending the Omaha-Chicago route after five years because low gas prices have reduced demand for its services. It seems people would rather pay to fill up their own cars than to ride the bus. The route also has stops in Des Moines, Davenport and Iowa City. The route cancellation is part of a wider reorganization of Megabus' Midwest hub, with job losses in Chicago and cutbacks in some other routes, the New Jersey-based company said.

## NARP report on autonomous cars

### NARP News Hotline, Friday, October 14, 2016

**Editor's Note:** *The ProRail Nebraska Board at its meeting Saturday, October 15, passed a resolution to monitor the development and implementation of autonomous vehicle technology in Nebraska and oppose any proposals to reduce public transit services in anticipation of this new technology.*

A report that NARP discussed last week on autonomous vehicles and their potential to change the future of rail transit, has garnered significant attention from media and readers. We noted that the report, "[Will Autonomous Vehicles Derail Trains?](#)" ignores new trends in resettlement patterns that have seen young and educated professionals moving to cities and walkable communities that has led to steady growth in passenger rail service, with cities and states looking to develop new rail lines and multi-modal stations. In addition, rail transit is technology that is readily available for the development of passenger rail networks, and it is a mode of transportation that people are familiar with, and can rely on.

This familiarity with rail technology is something that autonomous vehicles don't have with the majority of the American public yet. [The technology is not fully developed](#), and this poses a challenge for many developers as studies have indicated mixed feelings from consumers about self-driving cars. A report from the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) found that 70 percent of respondents were ready to test a self-driving car, but a survey released by the Altman Vilandrie and Company last month shows that 64 percent of people indicated they would not buy an automated vehicle because they believe the technology is dangerous. In addition, a University of Michigan survey earlier this year found less than 16 percent of consumers were totally OK with having fully autonomous cars.



*The interior of one of Helsinki's autonomous buses. There's no steering wheel.*

The mixed-bag of results could stem from inexperience with autonomous cars, but the technology could also face a series of regulatory hurdles before they are available for purchase by the masses. Currently, a patchwork of state regulations exist throughout the country. [Guidelines for driverless cars](#) unveiled by the White House last month sought to establish a uniform framework and clarify the state versus federal role, although it's a legally non-binding document. The guidance suggests that states be responsible for licensing human drivers, enforcing traffic laws and establishing testing requirements, while the policy plan envisions the federal government as having primary control over the actual automation software and recalls.

## Attending the NARP Advocacy Symposium and Meeting in Denver

*By Jim Hanna, ProRail Nebraska Director, District 4 and Liaison to NARP*

I was approached in early August by Jim Souby, the president of ColoRail and the Mountain and Plains Division Leader of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), about the possibility that I might become the Nebraska representative on the NARP Council, replacing Roger Clark, who moved to Arizona and has become their state rep. He suggested that I attend the fall NARP Advocacy Symposium and Meeting in Denver, scheduled for October 14 through 16, 2016. After careful consideration I decided to attend, so I joined NARP.

NARP always schedules their meetings in cities with Amtrak service, so I decided that the event would be a good excuse for a train trip and that my wife and I would get there a few days early and do some sightseeing. We found a Marriott hotel that was only two blocks from the Southmoor light rail station. One of the three lines that serve that station terminates at Denver Union Station where Amtrak also stops, which was convenient. Two of the other lines make a loop through the downtown area with a stop at the Convention Center, which is just across the corner from the Embassy Suites, the conference hotel.

Arrival in Denver was a few minutes ahead of the scheduled 7:15 a.m. Union Station and its environs have undergone a startling transformation since our last visit there. Detraining we found ourselves on a nice new platform with several stub-end tracks serving Amtrak and commuter lines to the Denver International Airport, Westminster, Golden, and soon Arvada. The depot has been totally renovated, inside and out. Amtrak has its ticket office and waiting area one corner of the former waiting room. The rest of that area is cafes, shops, and common seating. During the week we became quite adept at using the light rail system to get around, and were quite impressed with the system.



*Denver Union Station Transportation Center (RTD Photo)*



*Light Rail Shed at Denver U.S. (Jim Hanna)*

Friday, the first day of the convention, was devoted to giving attendees first-hand experience with the RTD rail system. Each of us received a pass that was good for unlimited travel on any RTD vehicle until about 2:00 a.m. the next morning. We were given a printed itinerary that directed us to use the light rail system to get from the hotel to Union Station. And from there to catch the “A” train to Denver International Airport. After lunch we gathered as a group down in the underground bus concourse to board a charter that took us to the new RTD EMU Shop where the commuter rail cars are serviced, and where they are dispatched.

The first official business of the conference took place late Friday afternoon with the Board of Directors Meeting, which was open to all NARP members as observers. Most of the business was related to the internal structure and operations of NARP.

At 6:30 p.m. all of the attendees were invited to a welcome reception fittingly held in part of the Union Station Main Hall. It was a purely social event, but a great opportunity to meet and visit with a

fascinating variety of passenger rail advocates from all over the U.S. while enjoying delicious food and libations.

Saturday morning activities began with a welcome by Chairman Peter LeCroy and President Jim Mathews. They praised the federal FAST Act as “the best piece of rail advocacy legislation in a long time”. The American Association of Railroads had petitioned the Surface Transportation Board to invalidate its policy dating back to the formation of Amtrak that gives passenger trains priority over freight traffic. Under pressure from NARP and other passenger advocacy organizations, the STB held their ground. Now the AAR is suing the STB, and probably deeply regretting raising the issue.

Mark Imhoff, the Director of the Division of Transit and Rail for the Colorado Department of Transportation, addressed the issues Colorado has faced with strong population growth that has led to major costs and disruptions in the road system. This led the state to form his division in 2009 to address the issue with more public transportation options.

The rest of the morning was taken up by three concurrent sessions:

#1 – Sneak Peek at the Future: US Passenger Rail in 2025 and Beyond

#2 – Solving the Infrastructure Conundrum: The \$300+ Billion Elephant in the Room

#3 – Lessons and Advances from Southwest Chief Campaign

I chose to attend session #2, though all would have been of interest

Attendees had lunch together where we were addressed by Travis Kelly, VP of Government Relations for the Texas Central Railway, a private company that is constructing a HS rail line connecting Dallas and Houston using proven Japanese technology



The afternoon continued with another round of concurrent sessions:

#4 – Fulfilling High-Speed Rail’s Promise

#5 – Is Transit-Oriented Development the Answer

#6 – Moving Ahead With Shared Passenger/Freight Corridors

I chose #6, as this is certainly an issue in Nebraska, with some of the nation’s busiest freight lines.

The NARP business meeting convened at 8:30 a.m. Sunday morning. Actor Dan Akroyd happens to be a passenger rail advocate, and did a very nice promotional video for NARP, which will be downloadable by NARP members and can be shown to local officials and civic groups. NARP is seeking to build advocacy relationships with all passenger rail operators, not just Amtrak. Get ready for NARP’s gala 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting, November 2-5, 2017.

The conference concluded with a luncheon, after which Gary DeFrange, the president of Winter Park Resorts, did a rousing presentation on the successful restoration of the Ski Train service from Denver to Winter Park using Amtrak equipment and operating expertise.

Based on my experience at the conference I did put in an application to be the NARP Council representative from Nebraska. I have not heard yet whether I have been accepted, but if I am I look forward to the job. I hope you will read my full report which is posted on the ProRail web site.

ProRail Nebraska  
7020 Burt St.  
Omaha NE 68132-2600

\$0.47  
Stamp

### Fall Meeting Sat. Dec. 10th

ProRail Nebraska's Fall Meeting will be in Lincoln on Saturday, December 10th, at 9:00 am (doors open about 8:30 am). The general public is welcome!

**Where:** St. Marks Episcopal Church on the Campus, 13th & R Streets, Lincoln, NE. Metered street parking is available near the church, or you can park in the LARSEN Building lot which is south of the church across "Q" Street (850 Q St.) for \$1.00/hr.

**See page 1 for details.**

For more information call Bob Kuzelka (402) 417-9424 (Lincoln) or email rkuzelka1@unl.edu

