



ProRail Nebraska News

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

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Volume XXVII

November 2017

Next ProRail Nebraska Meeting

Saturday, December 9, 2017 – 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)

All ProRail Nebraska meetings are open to the general public!

Tentative Agenda Topics

9:00 - Welcome & Introductions (Matt Roque, PRN President)

9:10 - PRN Secretary and Treasurer Reports

9:20 - Introduction of bill to eliminate sunset of Nebraska's MIPRC membership and report on Annual MIPRC Meeting Oct. 9-11 (Sen. Dan Quick from Grand Island – See article on page 2.)

9:50 - Proposed Abandonment of Lincoln's Amtrak Route (Roger Figard, Executive Director, Railroad Transportation Safety District - see news article on page 4)

10:20 - Break

10:30 - Update on NE Mobility Management Study (speaker from NDOT)

10:50 - Presentation on Lincoln's StarTran Transit System (see news article below)

11:20 - Plans for 2018 NE Legislative Session (Bob Kuzelka)

11:30 - Report of NARP meeting & 50th Anniversary in Chicago (Jim Hanna)

11:50 - Other ProRail Business, set dates for future meetings (Matt Roque)

Noon - Adjourn

For more information contact Bob Kuzelka (402) 417-9424 (Lincoln) email rkuzelka1@unl.edu. It may be possible to participate by conference phone. Contact Bob if interested.

Please join us on December 9th 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 9th Meeting

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

(Continued on page 2.)

PARKING INSTRUCTIONS for the Dec. 9th meeting: 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.

MIPRC Annual Meeting in Wichita, Kansas

October 9 – 11, 2017

Submitted by Bob Kuzelka (rkuzelka1@unl.edu)

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission’s annual meeting came to Wichita, Kansas, for 2017; perhaps an odd choice if you consider only that the city – 50th largest in the country, 10th largest in the Midwest, whose population exceeds Cleveland, Ohio – doesn’t currently have passenger rail service.

But MIPRC’s presence there on Oct. 9-11, and its emphasis on the importance of the regional passenger rail network and regional connectivity, may help change that. The meeting drew interest from local media, especially for presentations on the effort to extend Amtrak’s state-supported Heartland Flyer (Fort Worth, Texas-Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) north to Wichita and Newton, Kansas, where it would meet the long-distance Southwest Chief (Chicago-Los Angeles).

MIPRC commissioners, partners, sponsors and allies were also given a tour of Wichita’s century-old Union Station (above), hosted by Occidental Management, whose imminent restoration of the building – part of a larger, phased \$54 million project to renovate the station and immediate vicinity – will include room for an Amtrak stop if (when) passenger service is restored.

MIPRC commissioners, partners, sponsors and allies met at the Hotel at Old Town to review the past year’s activities and plan for 2018. Presentations included:

- Updates from member states on their passenger rail activities
- An update/outlook for passenger rail at the federal level from Amtrak
- Updates on federal funding for passenger rail from the Federal Railroad Administration, and on the FRA-led Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study
- Limitations of states in multi-state passenger rail development
- A spotlight on efforts to extend the Heartland Flyer (view “The Wichita Amtrak Arrival Train” video [here](#))
- An overview of Amtrak’s long-distance passenger rail service in the Midwest.

(Continued on page 3.)



Other topics included a general “MIPRC Year in Review,” an overview and discussion of MIPRC’s trip to Washington, D.C., on May 22-23, information on the Next Generation Equipment Committee, a report on MIPRC’s Partners Program and commission business including final approval of the FY 2018 budget and election of new officers. The full meeting agenda can be seen [here](#).

Beth McCluskey, director of the Office of Intermodal Project Implementation at the Illinois Department of Transportation, who represents Illinois as the governor’s designee, was elected as chair of MIPRC.

She replaces Tim Hoeffner, director of the Office of Rail at the Michigan Department of Transportation, who represents Michigan as the governor’s designee. Hoeffner stepped down as chair of MIPRC and was elected as vice chair, replacing Joan Bray, who represents Missouri as the governor’s designee.

Kansas state Sen. Carolyn McGinn, her chamber’s appointee to MIPRC, stepped down as the commission’s financial officer; she was replaced by Indiana Rep. Sharon Negele, her chamber’s appointee to MIPRC.

And a special thanks to meeting sponsors Occidental Management, the City of Wichita, the Northern Flyer Alliance, REAP of South Central Kansas, and WSP.

Commissioners also tentatively selected Lafayette, Ind., to host MIPRC’s annual meeting in 2018.

Lincoln will buy two all-electric buses with a federal grant

NANCY HICKS Lincoln Journal Star Oct 27, 2017

StarTran has received a \$1.45 million federal grant to purchase two electric buses to replace heavy-duty diesel buses. StarTran's project was one of 51 projects in 39 states selected for \$55 million in grants from the Federal Transit Administration's low- or no-emission vehicle program.



Lincoln StarTran CNG (compressed natural gas) bus

The grant, which also funds electric-charging stations for the buses, will be matched by \$500,000 in local funds. The electric buses, which cost about \$300,000 more than a compressed-natural gas bus, will be able to travel 200 miles before recharging.

Since most city buses run about 300 miles a day, the two buses will be used during peak hours and charged in between, according to Transit Manager Mike Davis.

Will Lincoln's Amtrak Line Be Abandoned?

By Clyde Anderson

According to an article in the September 10 Lincoln Journal Star, Lincoln's Railroad Transportation Safety District is concerned about grade crossing safety on BNSF's Hastings Subdivision between Lincoln's Amtrak Station and Cobb, a junction about 7.3 miles southwest of the City. This single-track line is used by the daily pair of Amtrak California Zephyr trains daily plus several BNSF freight trains.

End of the line?

The city-county Railroad Transportation Safety District is considering paying for BNSF Railway to abandon the so-called Amtrak Line, which cuts through southwest Lincoln. The trains that use that track would travel on a new line through the railyard along West O Street, and reconnect west of Pioneers Park.



11 collisions, four deaths since 1975: The Federal Railroad Administration maintains accident reports dating to 1975. This is what's happened along the Amtrak Line.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. F Street: No collisions | 5. West Van Dorn: No collisions |
| 2. West A: 1 collision, 1 killed in 2009 | 6. West Calvert: 1 collision |
| 3. Folsom: 4 collisions, 1 killed in 2007 | 7. South Coddington: No collisions |
| 4. West South: 5 collisions, 2 killed in 2017 | |

Source: Railroad Transportation Safety District

maps4news.com/©HERE, Lee Enterprises graphic

The Safety District is concerned about accidents at seven grade crossings on this line within Lincoln. This concern was heightened when two 17-year olds were killed August 18 when they drove around the lowered crossing gates at the West South St. crossing and were struck by a westbound Amtrak train. (Continued on page 5.)

(Continued from previous page.) Although the Safety District has considered creating a quiet zone that would include the seven crossings on the Amtrak Line within Lincoln City Limits, it is also considering a second option: abandonment of part of the line and rerouting through trains on an alternate route.

Creating a quiet zone would cost about \$5 million according to a recent study. This involves changes at each crossing including additional warning signals at and raised medians that prevent vehicles from driving around lowered crossing gates. This eliminates the need for engineers to blow train horns approaching the crossings -- thus the name quiet zone.

At Cobb there is a junction with BNSF's Freight Cutoff used by most freight trains to reach Hobson Yard. It's the green line in the map above. If part of the Amtrak Line is abandoned, the Safety District proposes to reroute the through trains off that line to BNSF's Ravenna Subdivision from Downtown west to Cushman, junction with the Freight Cutoff to Cobb. This proposal involves building a new signalized main track along the south side of Hobson Yard and upgrading the Freight Cutoff to Cobb to passenger train standards. Estimated cost: \$25 to \$35 million. Since BNSF sees no benefit to rerouting the traffic, the cost would have to be borne by the City, State, and Federal governments.

Abandoning the Amtrak Line as a through route is a bad idea. In addition to providing a more direct and faster route for the Amtrak and BNSF intermodal trains that use it, the route provides an alternate path when the route via Hobson Yard is blocked by a derailment, natural disaster, or maintenance. Our railroad network is already plagued by past abandonment decisions that eliminated route redundancy, something railroad managers often regret!

ProRail Board Votes to Oppose Abandonment of Lincoln's Amtrak Line

The ProRail Board met in Lincoln Saturday, October 28. After discussing the proposal by Lincoln's Railroad Transportation Safety District to abandon a segment of the Amtrak Line that extends from a point just west of the Amtrak Station 7.3 miles southwest to Cobb, the Board voted unanimously to oppose the abandonment. See the news article below for details. The Board opposes closure of the line to through traffic for several reasons:

- Closure would require Amtrak's *California Zephyr* and other through trains that use the Amtrak Line to reroute past BNSF's Hobson Yard which is longer and would likely result in delays by freight trains waiting to enter this often congested yard facility.
- Eliminating the alternate Amtrak Line would eliminate redundancy often needed when the Hobson Route is blocked by congestion, track maintenance, or derailments.
- The option of rerouting all traffic via the Hobson Route is more expensive because a new signaled main line would have to be constructed past the south side of Hobson Yard, and the Freight Bypass between Hobson and Cobb would have to be upgraded.
- ProRail supports the less expensive option of upgrading the grade crossings on the Amtrak Line to create a Quiet Zone. (See <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0889> for explanation of Quiet Zone.)
- BNSF doesn't support the proposed rerouting of traffic off the Amtrak Line.

We hope to have a spokesperson from the Railroad Transportation Safety District at our December 9 meeting.

ProRail Nebraska
7020 Burt St.
Omaha NE 68132-2600

\$0.49
Stamp

Fall Meeting Sat. Dec. 9th

ProRail Nebraska's Fall Meeting will be in Lincoln on Saturday, December 9th, 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.

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