

# PRORAIL NEBRASKA NEWS

Volume 15

September 27, 2004

## ProRail Nebraska Fall Meeting To Be Held Oct. 23 at Nebraska City

Plans are firm for our organization's fall meeting to be held at the P&Js at the Depot, the former Burlington passenger station, in Nebraska City. Assemble at the Depot, 725 South 6<sup>th</sup> St. at 9 a.m, coffee and donuts available.; lunch served on site; adjournment at 3 p.m. No registration fee. However, reservations needed (see details on page 10 of this newsletter) to allow the meeting venue to plan on the number to be served lunch. A large, varied menu covers about every taste; buffet not available.

At this writing, potential speakers are being contacted. **Kalil Jaber**, railroad liaison in the Nebraska Department of Roads, will summarize relevant rail-related issues from the DOR perspective. It has been some time since ProRail has received a briefing of this nature. Also, an academic staff member of the UNL Department of Mechanical Engineering will make a presentation on rail roadbed research.

Following the meeting, those interested can visit the *North Table Creek Garden Railroad*, constructed and operated by **Marty Cozad**, about three miles south of Nebraska City. (Directions given at close of the meeting). It is approximately 13,000 square feet in area, with 1,500 feet of track. Cozad says: "we think of ourselves as a modern mainline railroad with long trains and multiple lash-ups of head-end power." To reach the meeting site: approaching Nebraska City on U.S. 75 southbound, or eastbound on Nebraska Hwy. 2, take Nebraska City exit. This becomes 4<sup>th</sup> Corso—Business Hwy. 2—eastbound. Go all the way into town and turn right (south) on South 6<sup>th</sup> St. A new attraction at Nebraska City is the Missouri River Basin Lewis & Clark Interpretive Trails & Visitors Center.

## President's Message – Richard L. Schmeling

As an organization with not as many members as I would like, membership retention goes hand-in-hand with membership growth. The latest report indicates that some members have not renewed for 2004, and members of the Board have been contacting those persons to discover why they did not re-up. One of the members who did not renew was **Greg Giespert**, the Amtrak agent at Hastings.

Through the years, Greg has been a valuable member who offers us a source of information about Amtrak changes and problems. He has attended a number of our meetings insofar as his work schedule would permit. Greg was on my list, and I did call him.

Greg indicated that he was not renewing his membership because the last meeting he attended consisted of a lot of criticism regarding what Amtrak was doing or not doing. He did not think it was appropriate for an organization supporting railroad passenger service to rake his "employer" repeatedly over the coals. I did not attend this particular meeting he cited, as best I recall, but I have attended enough ProRail Nebraska meetings to affirm that what Greg says is correct.

As an advocacy organization, we face a dilemma: we support Amtrak and rail passenger service, but we also have a duty to be critical and call for needed improvements. We should try to make sure that our criticism is realistic--given Amtrak's continuous funding constraints—and constructive, given that highways and airlines receive substantial yearly subsidies almost automatically while Amtrak has to re-justify itself and its budget every year because it has no dedicated source of funding like the Highway Trust Fund and the annual appropriations for flight controllers and airport subsidies.

As a result of chronic underfunding, Amtrak has been unable to add a fourth sleeping car to the *California Zephyr* for the summer travel season, even though the demand is there. A number of Amtrak repair and maintenance shops need repair parts and components for which there are no funds. Equipment is short

throughout the system. In a climate where there are strong forces at play to kill the national rail passenger system, including long distance trains, sometimes mere survival is a victory.

Sure, we'd like to see a second pair of trains between Chicago and the Pacific Coast, trains that would come through Nebraska at a decent hour for boarding and detraining. This can be one of our long-term goals. We also would like to see Lincoln-Omaha-Kansas City trains, a corridor which Amtrak has studied and determined that this route would have good ridership. But the reality is that until Amtrak gets additional funding, this addition to the system will not happen.

In World War II, there was a slogan "*Loose Lips Sink Ships.*" Well, loose lips could easily doom ProRail Nebraska as well. In your criticism of Amtrak—both at ProRail meetings and in dialogue with the general public, many of whom are not Amtrak supporters--let's level realistic and constructive criticism only. ProRail Nebraska reserves the right, and duty, to be critical of Amtrak, but only with the proper focus. Think before you speak and then speak wisely! I'd like to be able to convince Greg Giespert that he should rejoin our organization and not worry about being a part of a group of whiners who no realistic solutions to the problems faced by our national rail passenger system. (Editor's note: in the dialogue with Amtrak, the public, and elected officials, let's avoid the classic question being asked: "Have you come with a solution, or are you part of the problem?")

### **Commuter Rail: a Step Back – Continued Comments by the President**

No one was more disappointed than I to read the final report of the consulting firm regarding the feasibility of commuter rail service between Lincoln and Omaha. During the course of the study, I mentioned to **Ken Sislak** that in assessing potential ridership, the consultants were assuming only a downtown Omaha to downtown Lincoln service, not our organization's concept of airport to airport. He deflected this input in saying that he didn't think either airport would favor such service. I'm sure they wouldn't. Lincoln Municipal Airport still aspires to greatness but is unwilling to concede defeat even in the light of another carrier pulling out of the Lincoln market. The hard reality is that most Lincoln residents will have to fly out of Omaha because of the number of flights and the fare structure favoring an Omaha Eppley Airport boarding.

However, both airports have poured massive amounts of cash into parking garages under the assumption that all air passengers will drive to the respective airport. Commuter rail service directly to the airport would result in half-full parking garages and substantial loss of revenue. Does the public care about this? No! They just want good, all-weather and convenient access to airports. The Oma-Link van service from Lincoln to Omaha costs \$40 and is not a good alternative to a good rail system. The consultants should have seen the wisdom of my constructive criticism, but they chose to ignore my input.

Early in the process we (ProRail representatives) furnished the consultants with a bundle of hard numbers regarding traffic potential related to Husker football games, attendance at the Lied Center, Omaha residents working in Lincoln (along with faculty and students commuting to UNL), and Lincolnites working in Omaha—along with residents along the corridor working in either city. Instead of using these data, the consultants utilized a "captive rate" based upon California commuter systems—which may, or may not—accurately transfer to the Midwest scenario.

I also furnished a memo about the Gallup Corporation bus service for its employees living in Lincoln but working at the Gallup Campus in Omaha. If Gallup was willing to subsidize bus service for its employees, it probably would do so for those opting for commuter rail. Wonder how many times during the past winter the buses from Lincoln were late due to slick highways? How are things working out with the bus operation, coping with constant I-80 construction between Lincoln and Omaha? How many times has one the Gallup buses been delayed because of the frequent motor vehicle accidents closing down the Interstate for varying lengths of time? However, as nearly as I can tell, this potential commuter ridership was not factored into the "capture rate."

We had also suggested stops in east Lincoln, at Waverly, Ashland, Gretna, Papillion and Ralston—at least for some trains. The consultants reluctantly factored in an east Lincoln stop at 48<sup>th</sup> Street, rather than 70<sup>th</sup> Street, where there is enough land for a good park-and-ride station, serving outbound commuters residing in the rapidly growing area of southeast Lincoln. The northeast station also would also facilitate incoming commuters employed at large scale operations on 70<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Ashland was omitted in spite of a letter from the State Game & Parks Commission citing a need for alternatives to the automobile for Mahoney State Park (as well as those patronizing the SAC Museum and the Wild Animal Safari). In addition, large scale housing additions are springing up around Ashland.

Criticism of the study aside—since we are now stuck with the report, however flawed—our astute vice president, **Jeff Poley**, made the insightful observation that the report *does not* say that commuter rail can't happen—just that based on the consultants' ridership projections, cost assumptions and required equipment—the service would not meet Federal funding criteria as it now exists.

Commuter rail service will be needed in the future and we need to take a step backwards and lay solid groundwork so that it can happen. We will include a question on a UNL-administered survey to be conducted this fall about needing to plan for ultimate commuter rail service between Omaha and Lincoln. We have an ongoing dialogue with the Mayor of Lincoln and the Mayor of Omaha regarding commuter rail. We continue to “test the water” with Senators in the Nebraska Legislature. Senator **DiAnna Schimek** has promised that she will introduce a bill creating an Eastern Nebraska Transit Authority, which would have taxing power and which could be used to plan for and start up the commuter rail system.

At our July board of directors meeting, rail activist **Jim Culver** presented a plan to start Husker football specials as a prelude to commuter rail. This idea is being pursued with the UNL Alumni Association being a possible sponsor of the trains. Initial contacts have been made with BNSF freight railroad to determine their requirements for initiating such a service on their trackage.

We will continue dialogue with Lincoln and Omaha City Planning Departments. Indications are that the new head of MAT—the Omaha bus system—may be more approachable on light rail and commuter rail issues than his predecessor.

In short, by taking a step back, we are moving forward in a meaningful way. All is not lost!

## **ProRail Nebraska Will Participate in Well-Regarded Survey –**

**Submitted by Richard Schmeling**

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bureau of Sociological Research conducts an annual survey to determine public attitudes on a number of current issues and gathers data from a significant sample size. The survey has been in place for a number of years and its findings are highly respected.

Last year, ProRail received information regarding the survey, but it was decided that with the Commuter Rail feasibility study in progress and the report not due until January, 2004, it would not be productive to participate in the 2003 survey.

At the July 31, 2004 ProRail board meeting, it was decided that to participate in the 2004 survey to be conducted this fall. I, in consultation with **Dan Lutz** and other members of the board, devised the three following questions to be included in the survey:

1. Congress should provide a dedicated source of funding for Amtrak, as it does for highways and airlines, so that Americans can have access to a good nationwide rail passenger system.

AGREE \_\_\_\_\_ DISAGREE \_\_\_\_\_

2. A recent feasibility study found there may be a need for commuter rail service between Lincoln and Omaha in the future. The State of Nebraska and communities along the proposed route should start planning for the system now before urban and rural growth make commuter rail much more difficult to put in place.

AGREE \_\_\_\_\_ DISAGREE \_\_\_\_\_

2. 2. Nebraska should support a plan to establish high speed rail passenger service between Omaha and Chicago and extend the proposed service from Omaha to Lincoln.
3. 3. AGREE \_\_\_\_\_ DISAGREE \_\_\_\_\_

I was authorized to negotiate a fee of up to \$1,000 for inclusion of these questions in the fall, 2004 survey. I was able to negotiate a fee of \$700 for the above questions, and formal documents will be signed with the Bureau to participate.

The responses to these questions will be available only to ProRail Nebraska, unless we authorized a further release to other entities. The Board feels it is important that we undertake this project. Positive responses to the questions would be most helpful in persuading legislators, executives, and administrators that rail passenger service is desired by most Nebraskans. Although this is not a small expenditure, it was felt that the balance in the ProRail treasury is more than sufficient to sustain current operations while paying for the study questions.

The results of national polls have indicated a high level of support for Amtrak and other rail passenger projects. If Nebraskans are less than favorable, we need to know and to what extent they oppose this mode of mass transportation serving all segments of the public. The survey results will help us to devise “messages” to send as part of our continuing efforts to educate Nebraskans about the need to not rely solely upon air and highway travel.

The survey is slated to be conducted during October, with results expected to be available shortly thereafter. Interviews will be done by phone and will be conducted by UNL students. All questions will be pre-tested, using a control group, to assure that the queries are understandable and phrased properly. Our questions may receive a big of “tweaking,” but we have been told that our questions sound pretty good as they now stand.

### **Member Benefit: ProRail Nebraska Online Discussion Group**

**Submitted by Gary Emenitove, PRN webmaster and moderator of our online discussion group**

One of the benefits of being a member of ProRail Nebraska is the opportunity to join—to whatever extent you wish—our discussions online via our “Yahoo Groups” e-mail discussion group. Our group generally does not carry a high number of messages, so you won’t be inundated. Generally, there’s one message a day or less, and in the rare case there’s a “hot” topic, there might be few messages a day.

Topics involve statewide information of particular interest to PRN members, national NARP messages relayed through the courtesy of NARP Region 10 director **Roger Clark**; state, regional and national news and developments of interest relayed by several PRN members, including news hound Dan Lutz; and discussions of local issues such as commuter rail and urban mass transit. Last-minute meeting and member information is also often transmitted via this channel.

The biggest advantage to joining our group is to acquire local, regional and national rail news at the speed of the Internet. It’s your choice, whether you just want to “lurk” and keep up on the current news, or post news of interest, or join in discussion and exchange of views..

To participate, all you need to do is send a request to Gary Emenitove, who moderates the group, at [Gary@thejoneses.com](mailto:Gary@thejoneses.com) Or, alternatively, you can sign up directly by sending a message to [ProRailNebraska-subscribe@Yahoogroups.com](mailto:ProRailNebraska-subscribe@Yahoogroups.com)

You have the option of receiving each message individually, receiving the day’s collection of e-mails all at once, or reading messages on your own by visiting the website.

If you have any questions about our group, contact me at the e-mail address above. For the good of the organization, we think it would be great for more members to get involved directly online.

### **Progress Report on Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission**

**ProRail Nebraska reimbursed Dan Lutz for Amtrak travel expense to attend a meeting of this body in June in Washington, D.C. Here is his report:**

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) brings together Midwestern state legislators, governors and their appointees to advocate for passenger rail improvements. The Commission works to promote coordination by Midwestern state officials and among the private sector at all levels—federal, state and local. Formed by agreement in 2000, the Commission’s current members are Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and Ohio.

Voting members are composed of two state legislators from each member state, and two delegates, appointed by the respective governors. The Nebraska delegation is composed of State Senators **DiAnna Schimek** and **Curt Bromm**; and appointees **Ray Lineweber**, railroad union representative; and **Dan Hoffman**, Policy Advisor, Governor’s Policy Research Office. Senator Bromm has posted a poor record of attendance at Commission meetings; It is believed that Lineweber and Hoffman have not attended any sessions. Attendees at the meeting who are not official appointees are termed “Allies;” they are invited to participate in discussions but cannot vote on formal proposals. Iowa passenger rail advocates continue to urge Iowa state government to become a member of the Commission. Attending the June session was **Eliot Keller**, well-known to ProRail Nebraska.

Senator Schimek was re-elected to the position of Financial Officer. Co-chairs are two Indiana state legislators; vice chair is from Missouri. Terms are one-year.

The Commission believes there is a critical need for the development of faster, more frequent passenger rail service to the region. The Commission strongly supports the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) plan for a 3,000 mile enhanced passenger rail system hubbed in Chicago. Such a system would ease congestion, provide jobs and give Midwesterners the variety of transportation options they need and deserve.

In a letter to Midwest members of Congress, the Commission declared: “Most of the federal money for improved passenger rail service has gone to the Eastern region. While we support that investment as a necessary first step, it is time for the Midwest—which is the rail hub of the nation and holds half of the remaining passenger rail miles in the nation—to take the lead. We need members of Congress such as you to make investment in passenger rail improvements a priority. We ask for your leadership and your support.

“First and foremost, the Commission supports the enactment of a dedicated federal funding program for infrastructure and equipment improvements necessary to implement regional rail systems like the MWRRI nationwide. Tax credit bonding legislation already introduced in the House and Senate can serve as models for such a program.

“Specifically, the MIPRC asks you to support:

- A dedicated tax-credit bonding program for intercity passenger rail development
- Within FY 2005 appropriations, \$1.8 billion for Amtrak, and sufficient funding for other rail programs, including Next Generation High Speed Rail funding.
- Rail-focused provision in TEA-21 reauthorization, including sufficient funding for projects of regional and national significance; and increased support for highway-rail grade crossing safety; SWIFT Act, RRIF and other infrastructure improvements.
- Rail tax credit provisions within the FSC/ETI “Jobs” bill.

## **Many Major Developments Involving Amtrak**

### **Amtrak Exits Bulk Mail & Express Hauling to Improve Core Passenger Service**

Amtrak is discontinuing shipping mail for the U.S. Postal Service in order to concentrate on the core business of transporting passengers. For many Amtrak customers, this will mean an improvement in the schedule of their trains. Two Amtrak services that were primarily extended to accommodate mail and express business are being reduced or eliminated.

“Mail and express no longer make business sense for Amtrak and have negatively impacted the quality of our passenger service, so the decision has been made to exit the business,” said Amtrak president and CEO

**David L. Gunn.** The plan is to conclude all mail and express activity by early October. A limited number of stations in Florida, Ohio and Indiana will no longer be served by passenger trains as a result of Amtrak's action.

Rationale for the action: Amtrak's mail and express business was marginal and did not justify the toll it took on passenger operations. Slower schedules necessitated by longer trains and the switching of express and mail cars at terminals and en route caused passenger dissatisfaction and increased costs. The cost to lease or maintain aging equipment was another factor in the decision to exit the business. In many cities, there were train delays due to mail handling. Approximately 300 Amtrak employees were affected by the action, primarily at terminals and stations. Most major changes will be effective after November 1; on or about March 1, 2005, service on the *Three Rivers* route will be eliminated west of Pittsburgh, following the legally required advanced notice to affected communities in Ohio and Indiana.

### **Congressional Appropriations Situation re Amtrak Outlined by UTU National Legislative Director James Brunkenhoefer – very timely and comprehensive (posted on Internet 9/13/04)**

The appropriations situation for Amtrak will be difficult because Congress's agenda is in chaos. During the last week of June, the House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee approved approximately \$900 million for Amtrak, approximately half the funds that Amtrak had requested. Amtrak has stated that it needs \$1.8 billion to meet its needs, and at least \$1.2 billion just to survive.

When the full Transportation Committee met, no changes were made, but the transportation appropriations bill has awaited floor action ever since. On the Senate side, the Transportation Subcommittee met and approved the minimum \$1.2 billion survival appropriation. It is not known if the Senate Appropriations bill will ever get to the floor.

A little background on the subject: The Appropriations process in Washington begins with a budget resolution. Under their own rules, Congress must pass the budget by June; however, Congress has not passed the budget yet this year. Each full Appropriations Committee is made up of 13 subcommittees. Each Appropriations Subcommittee passes out a single appropriations bill under its jurisdiction. Each bill is then supposed to be voted on separately by Congress. All of the bills are supposed to be signed by the President by October 1. If Congress fails to meet this deadline, then pass a continuing resolution (CR), to fund the agencies for which the appropriation bills have not passed. If this does not happen, these agencies shut down.

In recent years, the GOP has been getting later and later in passing these bills, and after the flurry of several CR's, Congress usually compiles an omnibus appropriations bill funding any agencies that have not already been funded before the October 1 deadline. It is very unusual that an omnibus bill has as many as six of the subcommittee bills included.

### **Congressional Appropriations Process – Challenge for Amtrak - Continued**

This year, Congress has successfully completed only one of the necessary 13 bills, with 12 bills still pending in the Senate. What's worse, with the clock running and less than three weeks to go in the fiscal year, Congress has yet to decide what path it wants to follow. They could either have CR's with an omnibus bill sometime in the first week of October, or adjournment for the fall general election; CRS with an omnibus bill in a lame duck session after the election; or CRs and shove it over to next year.

CRS usually only fund agencies with an amount equal to last year's appropriations, but nothing extra. Not only does this hurt Amtrak, but it also hurts every agency in government. An agency responds by making cuts and generally tightening its belt. As an example, the Federal Railroad Administration cuts travel and has fewer inspections.

While we wait until we know exactly what Congress is intending to do about the appropriations process, we, (and all Amtrak advocates) can call on the members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee, Transportation Subcommittee, since they are the most likely to serve on the Conference Committee and ask that

they support the Senate level of appropriations for Amtrak whenever they go to Conference on whatever bill it turns out to be, whether it's a separate appropriations bill or an omnibus bill.

**Excerpts from “Working on the Railroad,” article quoting out Amtrak President David Gunn, in the July 17, 2004 edition of *The National Journal*:**

Lead-in quote to the article: “No matter how much he shakes things up at Amtrak, David Gunn says he’ll never be able to do what critics want: make the rail service self-sufficient.”

Gunn, 67, came out of retirement in Nova Scotia to run Amtrak. (He has dual citizenship). He had previously run subway systems in Toronto, New York City and Washington, D.C., and is widely seen as a strong manager. Gunn reorganized Amtrak and instituted a rigorous head-count process through which he eliminated about 2,000 jobs from Amtrak’s workforce of 23,000. Most of the reductions occurred at headquarters and in support positions.

To get control of finances, Gunn established budgetary discipline, requiring detailed justifications of expenditures from his subordinates. Gunn also created a capital budget for the railroad, laying out a plan for getting Amtrak’s infrastructure back into good repair. Because money intended for infrastructure was poured into operations in the late 1990’s, Amtrak had a large backlog of projects. Since preventive maintenance wasn’t being performed, emergencies became more frequent, and on-time performance declined from 79 percent in 1999 to 73 percent in 2004.

As a result of management changes during Gunn’s tenure, Amtrak has kept its expenses flat; by contrast, from 1997 to 2001, expenses grew at an average rate of 8.5 percent a year. The company has taken on no additional debt since the 2002 bailout, although Congress gave Amtrak much larger subsidies in fiscal 2003 (\$1 billion) and 2004 (\$1.2 billion) than it did in previous years, i.e., \$827 million in 2002).

In addition, the system’s revenue picture is mixed. From 2002 to 2003, ridership went up by about 600,000 passengers, but overall revenue dipped by \$200 million because of the recession, Amtrak says.

While Gunn gets high marks from most observers for improving management of Amtrak, not everyone thinks he’s the right man for the job of conducting the railroad into the future.

**Bruce Richardson**, president of the Jacksonville, Fla.-based United Rail Passenger Alliance, said: “He’s cleaned up an awful lot of stuff. We’re beginning to see cracks of daylight where we hadn’t seen daylight before.

“But Mr. Gunn is enthralled with the infrastructure of the Northeast Corridor (Washington, D.C.-New York City, Philadelphia-Boston), at the expense of the national system.” Quote from the article: “Richardson’s alliance is made up of dissidents from the National Assn. of Railroad Passengers, a Washington-based advocacy group that Richardson contends is biased toward the Northeast Corridor”.)

The Alliance contends that the per-passenger federal subsidy in the Northeast Corridor is three times that of the federal subsidy per passenger on the long distance routes (including the California Zephyr), that Amtrak operates. The Alliance calculates that long distance trains run at 55 to 70 percent capacity, compared with 38 percent capacity in the Northeast. Amtrak’s figures—which show that Northeast trains carry three times as many passengers as all the long distance trains combined—make it seem as if the Northeast Corridor is the viable rail line supporting the rest of the country. The Alliance charges “it’s just plain old federal pork for the Northeast.”

The electrification of the northern end of the Northeast Corridor allowed for the introduction of the Acela high speed trains between Washington and New York and between New York and Boston. Amtrak estimates it has captured 53 percent and 40 percent of the combined airline and train ridership market on these routes, respectively, double the share before Acela’s arrival.

But to generate the revenue and ridership improvements, Amtrak increased its annual expenses from \$2.5 billion in 1998 to \$3.2 billion in 2002. The higher expenses, in turn, helped raise the corporation’s losses in that

period from \$846 million to \$1 billion. In addition, Amtrak went into heavy debt, up from \$1.7 billion in 1997 to \$4.8 billion in 2002, a 178 percent increase, according to the U.S. Transportation Department's inspector general's office.

The final paragraph of the article: "...At some point, lawmakers will have to tackle the issue of whether to accept Amtrak as it is, give it a new governance structure, or leave it to the marketplace to decide the fate of passenger rail. Whatever happens, Gunn is making two things clear: Amtrak has no plans to become self-sufficient, and without federal subsidies, he expects things to begin falling apart. 'We're approaching the moment of truth for Amtrak...we are not on a glide path to self-sufficiency..'"

### **Destination Midtown Report Includes Streetcar Plan** by Eric Miller

The final report for Omaha's Destination Midtown study was published earlier this spring, which includes a preliminary design for a streetcar line that would serve the central corridor of midtown starting at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and connecting downtown. The report says, "The modern streetcar would link Omaha's significant neighborhoods, and help encourage mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented redevelopment along the Farnam/Harney corridor."

The report envisions using brand-new modern equipment, similar to streetcar vehicles on the successful Portland Streetcar. A map is included in the report that shows the line going west on Farnam Street, south on 41<sup>st</sup> Street, turning around at Emile Street, going north on 40<sup>th</sup> Street, then heading east on Harney Street. The terminal in downtown was not given, but the potential exists for the line to extend to the Burlington Station. A second phase was mentioned that would continue the streetcar line west on Leavenworth Street to UNO and Ak-Sar-Ben. The streetcar would operate in the street with existing traffic, have stations spaced about every two blocks on the right side of the street near sidewalks, and would preserve on-street parking. The next step to implementation is to analyze the feasibility and further details of the modern streetcar.



### **Debunking Common Myths About Amtrak**

**Following are common myths about Amtrak; the facts to discredit them are authored by NARP Executive Director Ross Capon.**

**Myth:** Amtrak is unique in operating in the red, at taxpayers' expense. **Fact:** All transportation is subsidized by American taxpayers. Singling out Amtrak assumes taxpayers do not want to invest in passenger rail. Polls consistently show that Americans support federal funding for a national rail passenger system. A *Washington Post* poll taken in July, 2002 found 71 percent support for continued or increased federal funding of Amtrak

**Myth:** Highways pay for themselves through user fees. **Fact:** In 2001, 41 percent of the \$133 billion spent on highways came from payments other than the gas tax, tolls, and vehicle taxes, as follows: 15.3 percent general fund appropriations; 9.5 percent bond issue proceeds; 5.8 percent investment income and other receipts; 5.6 percent other taxes and fees; 4.8 percent property taxes. While most of this is at the state and local levels, federal policy encourages this by offering states generous funding matches for highway investments but no match for intercity rail investments.

**Myth:** Amtrak carries only a half-percent of the U.S. travel market; therefore it is insignificant. **Fact:** Where there is a strong Amtrak presence, as in the Northeast Corridor and New York-Albany, Amtrak dominates the airlines and offers a significant alternative to automobile travel. Amtrak handles about 50 percent



of all New York-Washington airline plus railroad traffic. As travel volumes grow in the future, and construction of new highways and airports becomes less practical, the need for such services also will grow around the nation.

**Myth:** Any dollar going to Amtrak is another dollar not going to roads. **Fact:** Federal funds for roads come from the Highway Trust Fund, a dedicated long-term source of funding, whereas Amtrak receives federal dollars from the General Fund through the annual appropriations process. However, states and local governments should have the option to spend transportation dollars on the most efficient mode of transportation. Current policy discourages states and local governments from investing in intercity rail

**Myth:** Shut down Amtrak and the private sector will operate passenger rail. **Fact:** Rail passenger service was in private hands from its inception in the 1830s until 1971, when Congress and the Nixon Administration made a policy decision to create Amtrak because the private sector could not make a profit. The private sector operators that have expressed an interest in operating rail passenger service will do so for a fee with the clear expectation that the government will absorb the associated losses. Furthermore, most Amtrak route miles are on tracks whose owners, the private freight railroads, do not want to run their own passenger trains and have a top priority of opposing legislation to give Amtrak's rights (for track access at reasonable cost) to any other entity.

**Myth:** Flying is cheaper than taking a long distance train. **Fact:** Anyone with a computer can find a train fare that is less than an airfare, or the opposite. Long distance trains don't just go from one major market to another like flights, but serve many intermediate markets with poor or no air service (or costly air service). Furthermore, the walk-up fare for Amtrak is often much less than walk-up airfare. There also are people who cannot or do not want to fly

**Myth:** One particular route (i.e., the Kentucky Cardinal between Chicago and Louisville, Ky), shows the entire national Amtrak system is flawed. **Fact:** The Kentucky Cardinal was instituted in 1999 to grow express package business. The profitable business never materialized and Amtrak discontinued the route on July 6, 2003. Despite limited ridership, no community wants its passenger train to disappear. Residents of Louisville recently filed a class action suit against Amtrak and the U.S. Dept. of Transportation to bring back the route.

**Reservations needed for Oct. 23 meeting luncheon:** Please e-mail your intent to attend (number of persons/names) to: Morrie Tuttle at [mtuttle@inebraska.com](mailto:mtuttle@inebraska.com), or send him a postcard to: 1910 Lake St., Lincoln NE 68502. Thanks for your cooperation.

---

### **Listing of Current ProRail Nebraska Officers –**

Terms served from annual meeting held in May according to organization's by-laws

**PRESIDENT:** Richard L. Schmeling, 4612 Van Dorn St., Lincoln NE 68506 Phone: (402) 327-8444 (no e-mail)

**VICE PRESIDENT:** Jeff Poley, 5727 The Knolls, Lincoln NE 68512-1936 Phone (H) (402) 423-5024 (W) (402) 472-7000 e-mail address: [jpoley2@unl.edu](mailto:jpoley2@unl.edu)

**SECRETARY:** F.M. "Morrie" Tuttle, 1910 Lake St., Lincoln NE 68502-3816 Phone: (402) 435-5454 e-mail address: [mtuttle@inebraska.com](mailto:mtuttle@inebraska.com)

**TREASURER:** Fred Henninger, 2801 South St., Lincoln NE 68502 Phone: (402) 465-9796 e-mail address: [FredH1944@aol.com](mailto:FredH1944@aol.com)

**PAST PRESIDENT:** Mike Hromanik, 27708 Waverly Rd., Murdock, NE 68407 Phone: (H) (402) 867-2081 e-mail address: [mh65635@alltel.net](mailto:mh65635@alltel.net)

**DIRECTOR – Dist. 1:** Dan B. Lutz, 3915 Apple St., Lincoln NE 68503 Phone: (402) 464-3571 e-mail address: [dlutz@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:dlutz@unlserve.unl.edu)

**DIRECTOR – Dist. 2** David Purdy – 16329 Webster St., Omaha NE 68118 Phone: (402) 492-8524 e-mail address: [dandepurdy@cox.net](mailto:dandepurdy@cox.net)

**DIRECTOR – Dist. 3 – Ralph Hayden\* - 8221 Sandalwood Dr., Lincoln NE 68510**

**Phone (402) 489-9229 – no e-mail**

**DIRECTOR – Dist. 4 – Grace Varney\* - 3224 Curtis Dr., Lincoln NE 68506-5600**

**Phone: (402) 327-8564 – no e-mail**

**\*Hayden and Varney, although Lincoln residents, represent Greater Nebraska PRN districts coinciding with Congressional Dist. 3 – PRN Dist. 3 - south of Platte River; and #4 –north of Platte River) because there were no nominees from these geographical areas for empty director seats; “gerrymandering” authorized by ProRail Nebraska by-laws.**