



ProRail Nebraska News

Volume XVIII

October 2008

Plans Near Completion for ProRail Nebraska Membership Meeting November 15

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. (coffee and doughnuts available at 9 a.m.) in the auditorium of the Douglas County Extension Office at 8015 West Center Road.

To reach the meeting site from I-80: Exit at 84th St. and drive north on 84th to Hascall St. Turn east (right) at Hascall and proceed to South 80th St., then turn north (left) on 80th St. Proceed north, and as you approach Center St., there is a median. Turn left into the Extension Office parking lot just before the median begins.

From Center Street: The Extension Office is located on a frontage road that parallels Center St.. You enter this frontage road from the signalized intersection at 78th & Center, then proceed west on the frontage road to 80th St. Turn south (left) on 80th St. and the first driveway enters the parking lot.

Enter the north door, and the Auditorium is on the right. Signs will be posted.

There is no registration fee, but if you plan to attend, we would encourage an e-mail to secretary Morrie Tuttle at mtuttle@inebraska.com. If attendance appears to be light, we will implement a phone tree. Coffee and doughnuts will be available on arrival. The meeting is scheduled to last until the noon hour, possibly until 1 p.m. Options to drive to various restaurants/eating places will be given for the option of dining before embarking on your return trip.

The confirmed featured speaker is **Marc Magliari**, Media Relations Manager for Amtrak for the past seven years. Magliari spoke at the NARP Region 10 meeting held in Omaha a couple of years ago and was well received. He will appear at a prime time since legislation relating to Amtrak has passed through the U.S. Congress, and at this writing, is very encouraging, if not vetoed by President Bush.

Subjects and presenters which are being sought for the meeting:

---Lincoln city official to report on the relocation of railroad trackage—and the Lincoln Amtrak station—within the Vision 2015 project.

---Paul Rumler to speak about the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition.

---One of Nebraska's four representatives to the Midwest Interstate Rail Coalition will be invited to present an update on projected developments of rail passenger service affecting the state.

---One of the active proponents of the proposed Kansas City-Omaha Amtrak route will be invited to present an update.

---PRN board director Roger Clark of Grand Island, a member of the NARP board of directors representing Region 10, will report on happenings at the NARP board meeting which will have been held a short time previous to our meeting.

---Clyde Anderson will present a proposal for a second Chicago-Denver train, a report comparing potential passenger rail routes from Kansas City to Omaha, and the rhetorical question: **Should ProRail also be Pro-Bus?**

---President Purdy will discuss his Statement of Objectives relating to present and projected ProRail Nebraska projects and initiatives.

---Bob Kuzelka will report on a PRN-conducted survey of candidates running for public office in November relative to their opinions regarding transportation--and particularly railroad passenger issues.

Need assistance the morning of the meeting? Call Clyde Anderson's cell phone at (402) 740-5556.

Rail Advocates Hail Passage of Combined Rail Safety/Amtrak Reauthorization Bill

The following is a statement from National Assn. of Railroad Passengers (NARP) Executive Director **Ross B. Capon**.

“NARP congratulates Congress on passing H.R. 2095, the Rail Safety Improvement Act including the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act. The 74-24 vote in the Senate and passage by voice vote September 24 in the House reflect strong, bipartisan, nationwide support for a safe, bigger passenger train network. This support transcends political differences.

“It is consistent with what people are doing. In Richmond, Va. U.S. Secretary of Transportation **Mary Peters** said ‘transit and rail are seeing record growth,’ and noted that Amtrak carried more riders in July than in any month in history, and said Americans drove 3.6 percent less, or 9.6 billion miles fewer, in July 2008 than July 2007.”

“The vote in the Senate culminates a long process. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act was first introduced in 2005 as S. 1516.

“Reauthorizing Amtrak does not guarantee funding. Passenger train supporters on Capitol Hill and around the nation must continue to work to see that the White House and Amtrak actually request—and Congress provides—the authorized funding so that we can meet growing demand for trains. H.R. 2095 includes increased funding for state partnerships, studies of reinstating the North Coast Hiawatha and Pioneer routes, and a requirement that Amtrak develop a plan to restore service between New Orleans and Florida.

“The safety measures of H.R. 2095 also will provide a significant shot in the arm for the railroad industry, which has also voiced support for the measure. By mandating and assisting with the deployment of Positive Train Control, this legislation will allow a more efficient and safer rail system for both passengers and freight.”

“We thank all those who worked hard to get this bill passed and urge President Bush to sign H.R. 2095 into law promptly.”

Additional information on the bill from an Associated Press news story:

“The bill also calls for Amtrak to receive \$13 billion over five years in subsidies, though Congress will have to separately approve the money year after year. There’s a new initiative to encourage private development of high speed rail corridors, \$2 billion in grants to states for rail projects and money for Washington D.C.’s subway system.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Announces Latest Driving Data, New Funding to Improve Intercity Passenger Rail

As Americans continue a historic cutback on driving and turn to other forms of transportation like rail and transit, a new approach to funding intercity passenger rail projects will lead to improved service and better on-time performance across the country, U.S. Transportation Secretary **Mary E. Peters** announced September 30.

Peters released new data showing that since last September, Americans have driven 62.6 billion miles less than they did over the same nine-month period last year. Meanwhile, she said, transit ridership is up 11 percent, and in July, Amtrak carried more passengers than in any single month in its history.

“At a time when transit and rail are seeing record growth, the very way we finance these systems is at risk. That is because our transit investments come from the same source as our highway investments—federal gas taxes,” Peters said. “Federal transportation policies that rely almost exclusively on gas taxes are failing our state and local governments.

As part of a new plan to improve intercity passenger rail service nationwide, the Secretary announced the Department is providing \$30 million to match local investments in 15 rail capacity projects across the country. These federal-state partnerships will support projects designed to cut delays and expand capacity on existing intercity passenger rail routes and help provide new services where none exist today.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Announces Latest Driving Data....Continued

Until now, she said, there has been no way for states to qualify for federal funds to match local investments in rail capacity as all federal funds have gone directly to Amtrak.

But, Peters warned, comprehensive reform is needed across the transportation system. In July, she unveiled a new proposal to reform and target transportation investments where they can best reduce congestion and improve infrastructure, while beginning to move away from relying exclusively on unstable gasoline taxes to finance transportation in the future.

The 15 intercity passenger rail grants the Department is awarding will support planning and construction projects in Arizona, California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin

Midwest High Speed Rail Assn. Weighs in on HR 2095

Preceding the text of an article sent to its members, the Association clarified that 2095 includes Amtrak's reauthorization. The federal government is now operating on a continuing resolution. The appropriations debate will begin again in January. It has been over a decade—November 1997--since Congress sent an Amtrak authorization bill to the President for signature. "The President is expected to sign the measure into law or face the possibility of an override of a veto. With a record low approval rating, President Bush is not looking for any fights like this."

"The bill would authorize new funding at Amtrak at \$5.3 billion in capital grants, \$2.9 billion in operating grants and \$1.9 billion for intercity passenger rail over five years. Once signed into law, Amtrak would the need to convince the Congress to appropriate funds at that level. After the current nationwide crisis is addressed, getting this kind of funding out of the federal budget/appropriations process may prove to be very difficult for Amtrak.

"The Senate vote of 74-24 in favor of passage, is more than enough votes to override any veto threat. Presidential candidate Senator John McCain voted against the bill. While the Bush administration has threatened to veto earlier versions of the Amtrak bill, the White House issued no statement of administration policy on this bill. Supporters are taking the President's silence as a signal he may be forced to sign the bill, given the overwhelming support it has received in both houses."

Late Development: Bush to Sign Bill to Nearly Double Amtrak Funding

Confirmation of White House Approval from Several Sources

President George W. Bush will sign legislation that boosts funding for Amtrak and other passenger rail services, setting up a broader debate next year over federal transportation spending that highlights differences between the two major candidates seeking to succeed Bush.

The number of riders on Amtrak, commuter rail and rapid-transit services has soared this year along with gasoline prices, leading Congress to increase federal support. The shift to rail and away from cars—Americans have been driving less for nearly a year now—will also affect next year's debate on a transportation spending bill that could cost as much as \$500 billion. Currently, the federal government spends more than \$40 billion annually on highways, roughly \$10 billion on mass transit and about \$1.4 billion on Amtrak. Advocates of shifting those ratios in favor of rail and mass transit hope to seize on the opportunity presented by rising energy prices.

The Bush administration had proposed lower Amtrak funding and a diminished federal role in transportation, calling instead for greater private investment and fewer earmarks.

ProRail Nebraska Studies Expanded Amtrak Service for Nebraska

By Clyde Anderson of Omaha, a PRN board member

Nebraska is poorly served by existing Amtrak service. The daily *California Zephyr* passes through our state at nighttime hours inconvenient to most potential passengers.

ProRail Nebraska is studying two new Amtrak operations serving our state: a second Chicago-Denver train on the CZ route, and a new service between Kansas City and Omaha that might also serve Lincoln.

For the second Chicago-Denver train, we choose to operate via the existing *California Zephyr* route because it would utilize existing stations and trackage already maintained to passenger train standards. Although the Iowa Interstate (Ex-Rock Island) route between Chicago and Omaha would serve cities with more population, the existing track is not suitable for moderate speed passenger trains and passenger stations and support facilities would have to be developed.

I quickly discovered why none of the railroads serving the Chicago-Denver market in the 1950s offered a daytime train – the 17 to 18 hours required to make the 1,040 mile trip is too long for convenient times at Chicago and Denver.

For example, a 7:30 a.m. CST departure from Chicago would arrive at Denver at 1 a.m. MST. Because of the hour lost due to the time zone change, the eastbound schedule is even worst: depart Denver at 6 a.m. and arrive Chicago about 1:30 a.m. Remember: the *Denver Zephyr*, *City of Denver* and *Rocky Mountain Rocket* were overnight trains.

So we decided to look at a more modest option: a second train between Chicago and Lincoln, a return of the *Nebraska Zephyr*. The 555 mile one-way trip would take about 10 hours and 20 minutes, providing much more marketable times to potential passengers. More details in my presentation at the November 15 meeting.

Second possibility for Expanded Amtrak Service for Nebraska passengers:

Kansas City-Omaha: (On paper) there are at least four potential passenger rail routes between Kansas City, Mo. And Omaha:

- Union Pacific: Falls City Subdivision via Leavenworth and Atchison, Ks., Falls City and Nebraska City
- BNSF via St. Joseph, Mo., Hamburg and Pacific Junction, Ia. and Plattsmouth
- BNSF via St. Joseph, Mo. to Falls City, then Union Pacific to Omaha
- BNSF via St. Joseph, Mo. Falls City, Lincoln and Ashland.

The listed Route 1 via the U.P. is the shortest—199.3 miles, but the BNSF route via Lincoln—266.8 miles, has the advantage of being almost as fast and serving more population centers. The BNSF route via Hamburg and Pacific Junction, Ia. involves a 76.5 mile segment of un signaled track. The PRN board favors the “hybrid route” 3, which covers the third shortest distance—216.4 miles from Kansas City to Omaha. Running time is estimated at 4 hours – 45 minutes, with intermediate stops at Parkville and St. Joseph, Mo., Falls City, Nebraska City and possibly Plattsmouth.

Come to our November 15 meeting for more details and discussion.

Should ProRail Also be Pro-Bus?

Analysis by Clyde Anderson, ProRail Nebraska board member

According to our mission statement, *ProRail Nebraska is a not-for-profit organization founded to inform the citizens of Nebraska about the benefits of railroads and to promote balanced, efficient transportation—both freight and passenger—in Nebraska and the nation.*

Intercity bus service in Nebraska has declined substantially during the past decade. Except for service east from Omaha, Greyhound has abandoned our state.

Two bus lines—Burlington and Black Hills Stage Lines—each offer one round trip bus schedule between Omaha and Lincoln. These bus schedules are actually part of Omaha-Denver services with both companies operating via I-80 and I-76 to Denver. Obviously, these buses do not cater to the Omaha-Lincoln commuter! (Black Hills Stages also provides bus service between Omaha and Norfolk.)

Amtrak has no thruway motorcoach connections in Nebraska. Its van service connecting the Omaha and Kansas City Amtrak stations was discontinued a few years ago.

Should ProRail Also be Pro-Bus?....Continued

In addition to promoting improved Amtrak service in Nebraska and commuter rail service between Omaha and Lincoln, ProRail needs to lobby for better local transit service in Omaha and Lincoln, as well as renewed intercity bus service across our state. Our proposed NTRAC commuter service will likely not succeed without good transit connections between the train stations and riders' trip origins and destinations.

Caltrans proved that state-sponsored bus service connecting to its Capitol, San Joaquin and Surfliner corridor trains generate a high volume of connecting passenger traffic.

Since it will take a minimum of five to seven years to implement commuter rail service between Omaha and Lincoln, why not implement a premium commuter bus service in that corridor now?

Metro Area Transit (MAT) or a parlor bus operator such as Arrow Stage Lines could operate that service, and implementation could take less than a year. Initially the service would be subsidized by the State of Nebraska and possibly progressive employers such as Gallup. To attract riders, the new bus service needs to operate frequently—perhaps hourly during the morning and afternoon rush hours and every two hours during evenings and weekends.

As ridership grows, the customer base would help justify the upgrade to commuter rail service, at least during peak periods.

Should the Lincoln-Omaha corridor commuter needs be met by either commuter rail or commuter bus service, or both? Should ProRail Nebraska adopt a pro-bus policy? Bring your ideas and thoughts to the meeting November 15. Get on board!

Colorail Initiates Effort to Reinstate the *Pioneer* Amtrak Train

Colorail, the Colorado independent state affiliate of the National Assn. of Railroad Passengers, a sister organization to ProRail Nebraska in NARP Region 10, has published a special report focused on the possibility of reinstating the **Pioneer**, the former Amtrak service between Denver and the Pacific Northwest.

Federal legislation (S. 294) was introduced calling for “a one-time evaluation of the Pioneer Route formerly operated by Amtrak to determine...whether a level of passenger demand exists that would warrant consideration of reinstating the entire Pioneer Route service or segments of that service.”

From the Colorail Special Report: “Many things have changed since the 1997 discontinuance of the Amtrak Pioneer Service. Establishment of the train in 1977 was the outcome of a 6-year struggle with the original “Railpax” plan by the U.S. Department of Transportation killed all four daily trains east from Portland. Separate issues brought service to Wyoming in 1971, then took it away when the Rio Grande route through the Moffat Tunnel became available. It came back to Wyoming in 1991, was cut to disruptive and costly tri-weekly operation two years later, till deleted entirely.”

A Colorail team visited Pioneer country and came up with some suggestions/conclusions:

Traditionalists prefer the all-Union Pacific route from Denver via Fort Lupton and Greeley to Cheyenne, then on west to Laramie. The traditional line results in a back-up move in Cheyenne and the station has been converted into a museum. At 15th St. and O'Neill Avenue in Cheyenne there is room in a city parking lot for an Amtrak stub station facing the right direction, with an address on Pioneer Street!

The Amtrak Pioneer bypassed Cheyenne via the Borie Cut-off, just as the Union Pacific Streamliner from Denver did.

There's another route, however, with better scenery, more population, two major universities, and political support for transportation improvements. BNSF tracks through Boulder and Fort Collins, Colo. head into the Union Pacific in the right direction to serve a Cheyenne Pioneer Street stub station.

Space does not permit further detail, but the Colorail team checked out a direct line between Green River, Wyo. And Pocatello, Idaho, and access to Boise, Idaho. Reinstatement of the Pioneer would attract Nebraska boarding passengers headed for Idaho and Oregon.