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**Capitol View  
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**It’s Time to Get Serious About Rail Travel in Nebraska**

When I packed up to go away to college, my folks put me on the train in Scottsbluff at night and I arrived in Lincoln at 6 a.m. the next morning. It was a smooth trip and I recall having a good sleep as the miles clicked by.

That was more than 50 years ago. Such travel is no longer possible across Nebraska. A couple years after that first trip, I chose to take the train home for Christmas. But the train only went as far as Alliance and I had to find a ride the rest of the way. A few years later there was no passenger train.

Today, the Nebraska Department of Transportation is focused on improving the Interstate traffic flow between Lincoln and Omaha and has plans to increase the number of lanes from Lincoln to Kearney. Meanwhile, gas prices increase and car-manufacturing production limps along because of a shortage of microchips to run advanced technology in those vehicles. Promoters of electric vehicles are having a heyday touting their latest.

It’s time – maybe even past time – for the Nebraska Legislature to get on board for a study of the feasibility of passenger train service between Lincoln and Omaha. Senator Carol Blood’s bill (LB12) called for said study but never made it out of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. Likewise, Sen. Elliot Bostar’s bill (LB575) to allow Nebraska to join the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact with eight other states also never saw the light of day. Such membership is necessary for the state to have a shot at federal funding for rail projects.

A recent op-ed piece by Richard Schmeling of Lincoln, the President of Citizens for Improved Transit, caught my attention. He listed the number of accidents, injuries and fatalities on the 45-mile stretch of Interstate from Lincoln to Omaha. One can only imagine that adding

**For Release Wednesday, June 30, 2021 – Page 2**

more lanes to the highway will increase the capacity for motor vehicles and the afore-mentioned statistics.

Talk of a rail line between the two cities has been going on in the Legislature for decades. There is anecdotal evidence of the large number of people who live in one city and work in the other. An actual survey would provide solid numbers on which to gauge the seriousness of such a project.

But don’t stop there. While we’re used to seeing coal trains or unit trains (100 cars) of agricultural commodities and a few mixed freight trains traversing the state, envision an occasional passenger car or two on one of those trains, not Amtrak, but a local train dedicated to getting across Nebraska. Remember and learn from the mistakes of several failed airplane tries at that statewide link.

I know it won’t be like the trip with my mother and my older sister from Gering to Chicago in the early 50s, but we might take something from those memories. I was fascinated with the trackside hooks that held or snagged mailbags and the stops at assorted small depots to load or unload people or milk cans and other freight.

We may have outlived the practicality of those times, but in our quest to slow down and simplify things again, let’s look at what might still work.

No, I don’t think we need to go back to black and white television or telephones firmly affixed to the wall. But we should be willing to discuss something as time-tested as railroad transportation. It would be an informative and refreshing discussion. Let’s hope the Legislature sees fit to set the wheels in motion.

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