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January 31, 2012

Senator Deb Fischer
Transportation and Telecommunications Chair
District 43, State Capitol
Room 1110
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Opposition to LB 747

Dear Senator Fischer and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the City of Lincoln, I would like to express our opposition to LB 747. This bill would terminate the State of Nebraska's participation in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact.

For a variety of reasons, the City of Lincoln believes withdrawing from the compact is shortsighted and unnecessary. The City of Lincoln has a strong interest in an expanded and healthy passenger rail system. Removing our state's participation in the compact will dramatically affect the future of passenger rail in Nebraska, an important element in long-term cost-effective and efficient transportation plans for the state. Further, the economic development potential of additional passenger rail development through Nebraska, including high-speed rail, can continue to be best addressed through our participation in a regional compact.

The primary purpose of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact has been to bring together state leaders and coordinate public-private initiatives to develop and implement improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest, including in and through Nebraska. The regional approach to this major mode of transportation is critically important, given the nature of passenger rail systems. This collaboration is showing great success.

Presently, a major daily east-west Amtrak route (the "California Zephyr") runs on Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks through Nebraska, including stops in Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings, Holdrege, and McCook. There are increasing numbers of passengers taking advantage of the modestly priced train trip to and from Chicago and Denver from Nebraska stations. Overall, passenger rail ridership is thriving and continues to grow, both across the country and here in the Midwest. On shorter distance rail corridors (less than 750 miles) in the Midwest, ridership on nine routes grew by 5.4% in FY 2011, and exceeded the 2.9 million mark. Over the

past five years, corridor ridership in the Midwest has grown by 54%. Nationwide, Amtrak experienced an all-time ridership record of 30.2 million passengers for the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

In addition, the states involved in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact worked together to obtain significant passenger rail improvements through the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program (HSIPR). This funding will bring faster, more frequent service on several routes across the Midwest. To date, more than \$2.5 billion in HSIPR funds have been awarded to eight Midwestern states for more than two dozen projects, including track, signal and bridge improvements, station development, and planning for new and improved service. The State of Nebraska, although a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact, elected not to participate in this funding collaboration. Nevertheless, the additional, upcoming opportunities to work with our neighboring states on collaborative funding for system improvements, including for high-speed rail, should not be ignored. In this light, it is vital that the State of Nebraska continue as a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact.

The City of Lincoln also wishes to emphasize the economic development ramifications of the main Chicago to Denver passenger rail route continuing to run through Nebraska rather than another state. Both system improvements and increasing ridership in and through Nebraska represents significant, multi-million dollar opportunity realized over a long period of time. This is particularly important for the City of Lincoln. As part of the West Haymarket redevelopment, which includes the Pinnacle Bank Arena, the City of Lincoln is investing in a new Amtrak passenger rail station. This new \$2 million, 3,000-square-foot Amtrak station in the West Haymarket district is designed to accommodate present and future growth needs for Amtrak and Lincoln, and facilitate expanded numbers of passengers, multiple lines, and high-speed rail. This new station is a commitment to a future for cost-effective, energy efficient passenger rail service for both the City of Lincoln and the State of Nebraska. Ending the state's participation in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact would unnecessarily complicate further passenger rail options and opportunities for both Lincoln and other cities in our state.

The City of Lincoln respectfully asks that you reaffirm Nebraska's commitment to a range of transportation options, especially during these ongoing days of high-priced gasoline. One simple demonstration of this commitment is the maintenance of Nebraska's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact, and the rejection of LB 747.

Thank you for your time and please let me know at any time if you need any further information.

Respectfully,

CITY OF LINCOLN



D. Milo Mumgaard
Senior Policy Aide to Mayor Chris Beutler

cc: Senator Kathy Campbell
Senator Danielle Conrad
Senator Ken Haar
Senator Norman Wallman
Senator Bill Avery
Senator Colby Coash
Senator Tony Fulton
Senator Amanda McGill
Denise K. Pearce, City of Lincoln