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4612 Van Dorn Street  
Lincoln, NE 68506  
September 3, 2011

Lincoln/Lancaster Co.  
Planning Department

Planning Department  
City and County  
555 So. 10th Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Re: 2040 Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Plan

Dear Sirs:

Here are my comments about the latest comprehensive plan and transportation plan for 2040:

1. The consultant from LSA Associates of Ft. Collins, Colorado, as reported in the March 10, 2011, issue of the Journal-Star, concluded that Lincoln is not yet big enough for Light Rail. Perhaps he should have his pay docked for such a ridiculous conclusion. With Lincoln's population at about 60,000 it had a flourishing streetcar system - the predecessor to Light Rail.

2. The problem is not the size of the city but, rather, the fact that all planning to date has been sprawl-oriented rather than Transportation Based. Lincoln will never have a modern, viable transportation system, either bus or rail, as long as sprawl development continues.

3. The concept of Transportation Based Zoning has been a huge success in Portland, Oregon where Light Rail lines provide fast, convenient service. I have ridden the system and talked with people who say that transit time on Light Rail is far better than they can achieve driving their own cars. The Light Rail option eliminates the cost of parking and the cost of gasoline and wear and tear on the family auto.

4. Portland has devised a system where the bus lines serve their true best function -- as feeders to Light Rail terminals. Bus-train service is so coordinated that as a bus pulls into the station the train is arriving and a cross-platform transfer is easy.

5. Good transportation corridors require population density. Population density can be achieved by Transportation Based Zoning whereby more dense zoning categories are placed along the corridors and then the density tapers off away from the corridor.

6. LSA Associates did a grave disservice to Lincoln when they failed to recommend that Light Rail transportation corridors for Lincoln be identified today and all future planning be oriented to making these corridors viable. My thoughts are that the possible corridors today are:

- a. O Street from 90th to SW 40th.
- b. Lincoln Airport to Downtown
- c. Crosstown from the south end of Lincoln to Interstate 80 *on 7th St 09/03*
- d. Down the median of Normal Boulevard from southeast Lincoln to downtown with extension to UN-L campus

There may be others that should be considered. The important

overriding consideration is interconnectivity. The east-west line should intersect the north south line at 27th & O Streets where there would be a sheltered transfer station. There would be connectivity along all the corridors to bus routes to feed the Light Rail.

7. The fatal flaw in the current city bus system is slow transit time. The buses have to mix with automobiles which slows transit time down tremendously. Citizens are not willing to pay the time penalty to take public transportation. Light Rail lines should be built down the middle or at the side of streets, have their own dedicated right of way to free movement from vehicle conflict. Trains should have a pre-empt system similar to the fire trucks where as they approach a major intersection they can "demand" the traffic signal and coast into the intersection with the signal turning so that they can proceed without stopping. This works well on the Portland Light Rail line to Gresham which I rode from end to end.

8. Good public transit accomodates both long trips and short trips. In Portland I watched a woman board a Light Rail train with two bags of groceries from the grocery store. She rode the train two stops and got off and walked a block or two home. We here in Lincoln just have no concept about how good public transportation can be because we haven't had it since the streetcar system converted to a bus system.

9. We have done and continue to do everything possible to discourage public transportation by our planning decisions. Don Linscott, a noted Lincoln developer bemoaned the fact that downtown development was almost impossible because he could not accumulate enough land to provide parking. Why should we need parking? Good public transit would allow us to close all those wasteful parking garages we seem so intent on building. We won't need them any more because people won't be taking their cars down town or to the shopping centers.

10. If we never look ahead, we will never have good public transportation in Lincoln. In spite of LSA we need to plan ahead, identify the transit corridors today and then overhaul the whole zoning code so that we have Transportation Based Zoning in place for future development. Our "car and truck only" mentality needs to change. Why build and maintain an elaborate street system when we could haul the same number of riders on a double-track Light Rail line that would use less right of way than the current street system? The savings in governmental cost would be tremendous.

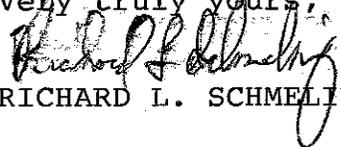
11. Finally, we move toward the desireable goal of reducing dependence on foreign oil by getting serious about public transit. We also reduce emissions since Light Rail is electric and environmentally friendly.

Am I the only one who sees this? As Lincolnites travel to other cities and to Europe and Asia and experience good public transit, perhaps the whole approach will change. I hope so.

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If you can't see the waste of our current auto-centric society, just drive the Lincoln streets during non-rush hour peaks. The streets are virtually empty. We have built huge overcapacity so that for an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening people can go a little faster -- and even that isn't working! Time to try a new approach.

Very truly yours,

  
RICHARD L. SCHMELING

P. S. Regarding Moe's observation about the cost of Light Rail, how about just doing no more street and road improvements and using the money for a Light Rail system and beefing up the bus system for feeder service instead? I'll bet there would be a lot of funds available if we just stopped widening streets and building parking garages. Relying on an improved bus system alone does not address the basic problem of bus runs stuck in traffic. Of course, Mr. Moe, I'm sure you realize that the only way to cure ~~the~~ the problem is to build dedicated bus lanes at a cost comparable to Light Rail.