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Thursday, August 21, 2025

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Riding the rails through Nebraska

State senator makes a pitch
for expanded rail service

JARED BARTON
The Columbus Telegram

In the days of yesteryear, trains crossed the country much like modern highways do today, carrying people between small towns and major metropolises alike, rolling to a stop at platforms bathed in steam and smoke in the bustling commercial heart of wherever it landed.

That is largely not the case today, but a movement has stirred in recent years attempting to make passenger rail more efficient and more feasible for the average rider, and Nebraska’s fifth district State Sen. Margo Juarez is traveling across the state in an attempt to get the idea of rail travel on track.

On Aug. 19, Juarez, along with several representatives from passenger rail ad-

vocacy groups, train enthusiasts and curious passersby, attended a town hall at the Columbus Public Library, kicking off her tour of Nebraska to gauge opinions on public transport.

She got the idea, she said, from riding Salt Lake City’s TRAX light rail system.

“The last time I was there, they had their light rail system in place,” Juarez said. “I was just there this summer for a conference and took the light rail from the airport all the way to my hotel downtown and across the street and it was so wonderful. It cost me \$1.25 for my trip.”

Her light rain experience inspired her to introduce a legislative resolution to examine the possibility and economic impact of alternative transit options in Nebraska.

“I was so disappointed to see the lack of progress in this state,” Juarez said. “I

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JARED BARTON, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

State Sen. Margo Juarez of Nebraska’s fifth district speaks at the Columbus Public Library on Aug. 19 about LR203, which resolves to investigate the potential impact passenger rail options would have in the state.

2025 NEBRASKA STATE FAIR

WHAT’S NEW AT THE NEBRASKA STATE FAIR



Nebraska State Fair workers move a large chair as setup continued Tuesday.

R.J. POST
Grand Island Independent

There’s more new at this year’s Nebraska State Fair than performing sea lions and sausage s’more skewers.

Some of the changes are more concrete — literally.

The parking lot south of the Heartland Events Center — where many of the vendors set up shop — has been repaved in concrete and received storm sewer work for better drainage.

The new surface will not only keep things drier but also cooler, Executive Director Jaime Parr said.

“The temperature of the white concrete as compared to the black asphalt is a big improvement,” Parr said. “It’ll be more comfortable on those hotter days.

“It’ll be a lot less hot for people’s feet and bodies as it radiates less heat upwards,” she said.

When it rains instead of shines, the drainage improvements will take water where it’s supposed to go — off the fairgrounds.

“It happens much faster with all of the underground storm sewer pipes,” Parr said.

“Up by the Welcome Center is a location that was notorious to hold rainwater for multiple days

after a small rain,” she said. “Even after that June 25 rain ... I came out the very next morning, and there was not a big pool of water by the Welcome Center.”

In front of the livestock barns, the new system channels water to underground detention cells.

“So the areas right in front of the buildings have not been holding water,” Parr said. “To date, they’ve been removing it, which is wonderful.”

Fairgoers will also see more grass and plants rather than pink rocks in front of the barns.

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NU distances itself from ‘Cornhusker Clink’ association

CHRIS DUNKER
Lincoln Journal Star

The University of Nebraska said it learned along with the rest of the state that the Department of Homeland Security intended to use the school and state’s moniker as part of the name for an immigration detention center near McCook.

The Work Ethic Camp, a minimum-security prison operated by the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, was rebranded Tuesday as the “Cornhusker Clink” by DHS Secretary Kristi Noem.

Later that evening, DHS posted an AI-generated image showing several ears of corn wearing dark hats embroidered with “ICE” patrolling a cornfield with barbed wire fences and a prison tower in the background.

“COMING SOON: THE CORNHUSKER CLINK,” the post stated.

The name follows conventions used by DHS in other Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities opened by the Trump administration this year: “Alligator Alcatraz” in the Florida Everglades; “Speedway Slammer” in Bunker Hill, Indiana; and “Lone Star Lockup” at Fort Bliss in Texas.

In a statement Wednesday, NU distanced itself from both the planned 280-bed detention center and the name given to it by the Trump administration.

“The University of Nebraska has had no role in the planning, naming or future operation of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility at the McCook Work Ethic Camp and learned of it only through the federal announcement,” the university said in a statement.

Co-opting both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s mascot and the state’s nickname since 1945 — the Cornhusker State — for the future ICE facility struck a nerve for some Nebraskans.

“I’m sure the university will love the association by name with it,” one man wrote on a Facebook post of a news story about the planned facility.

“If I was University of Nebraska-Lincoln I’d have issue with them using the term ‘Cornhusker Clink’ in naming their detention center,” another posted.

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