

= Transportation in Omaha =

Transportation in Omaha , Nebraska , includes most major modes , such as pedestrian , bicycle , automobile , bus , train and airplane . While early transportation consisted of ferries , stagecoaches , steamboats , street railroads , and railroads , the city 's transportation systems have evolved to include the Interstate Highway System , parklike boulevards and a variety of bicycle and pedestrian trails . The historic head of several important emigrant trails and the First Transcontinental Railroad , its center as a national transportation hub earned Omaha the nickname " Gate City of the West " as early as the 1860s .

During a tumultuous pioneer period characterized by its centrality in proximity to the Western United States , transportation in Omaha demanded the construction of massive warehouses where frontier settlers could stock up and communities west of Omaha got food and supplies to build themselves with . Riverboats and stagecoaches jammed the riverside city with a variety of newcomers , prospectors and shady characters . Early Omaha also landed the Union Pacific Railroad headquarters , leading to its important place in national railroad lore .

After quickly growing into a city , Omaha failed to pave its streets accordingly . A chaotic transportation system was highlighted by several miles of successful horsecar tracks ; however , the city only ever had four miles ( 6 km ) of cable car service . Several early suburbs were built on reliance of service from these lines , including Dundee , Benson and Kountze Place . In the early 1880s an extensive boulevard system was built to create a park @-@ like atmosphere for drivers throughout the city . The Trans @-@ Mississippi Exposition in 1889 led to the construction of many new transportation features , particularly the magnificent Burlington Station .

In the 1930s the city 's transportation system was marred by violent protests . Transit workers wanted to unionize , and with the main company 's management against any effort to change Omaha 's reputation as a non @-@ unionized city . After the introduction of buses in the early 1950s , streetcars were closed down , and in the last years of the decade the city began construction on its components in the Interstate Highway System .

Today Omaha 's transportation system is growing with the city , and trails for bicycles and pedestrians , as well as public transportation , highways and parkways , and other innovations are being developed . The city has a section of the Lincoln Highway listed on the National Register of Historic Places , and there are more than 100 miles ( 160 km ) of Interstate and freeway lanes , more than any other area in the state of Nebraska .

= = Pioneer period = =

Omaha was not projected to become a great city or bigger than its neighbor across the Missouri River , Council Bluffs , Iowa . In 1856 a land speculator reported to his East Coast concerns that , " C. Bluffs is steadily growing down towards the river and someday it will be one great city on both sides the river with Rail Road & foot & Carriage Bridges connecting the two ? and this is now the hope and talk of the Bluffers . " - J. Barker , 1856 .

In August 1859 Abraham Lincoln visited land he had invested in Council Bluffs , and while there did not consider it worth the time to cross the river to the village of Omaha .

= = = Water traffic = = =

In 1804 , fifty years before the city of Omaha was founded , the Lewis and Clark Expedition first arrived via the Missouri River . The 1806 Fort Lisa and 1820 Cabanne 's Trading Post were important fur trading outposts located in proximity to the river , along with earlier Fontenelle 's Post in Bellevue . The Engineer Cantonment was built by Captain Stephen Watts Kearny 's Yellowstone Expedition in 1819 . The Expedition 's craft , the Western Engineer , was the first steamboat to successfully venture up the Missouri River to the Omaha @-@ Council Bluffs area .

The Missouri was the reason Omaha was founded , and continued to be important to the city 's growth for many years . In 1853 William D. Brown had the first vision for the city , leading him to

found the Lone Tree Ferry crossing the Missouri River from Council Bluffs , Iowa . Later the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company hired Alfred D. Jones to plat Omaha City , which was among the first settlements in the Nebraska Territory . Along with the Lone Tree Ferry Landing in Downtown Omaha , other ferries were established in the Omaha area at Florence , Saratoga and Bellevue . Large steamboats would carry provisions up the Missouri from St. Louis , stocking the warehouses in Jobbers Canyon and loading the trains of the Union Pacific and at the Omaha Quartermaster Depot , which in turn supplied the U.S. Army 's Department of the Platte .

The Banner State was the first steamboat to land materials for building the city in early 1854 , before the city was formally founded . Until 1879 Captain Joseph La Barge was the principal figure among the Missouri steamboat captains in the early years of the city . According to J. Sterling Morton , the golden era for steamboating on the Missouri was from 1855 to 1860 , just before the advent of the railroads . In 1857 , 174 steamboats carrying 13 @, @ 000 tons of freight tied up at Omaha wharves . When Omaha became the outfitting center for Colorado gold seekers headed for Pikes Peak in 1859 , 268 steamboats arrived at Omaha between March and November .

With railroads becoming the dominant form of long @-@ range shipping and passenger travel in the early 1870s , riverboats like those in Omaha became obsolete . However , as late as 1949 the steamship Avalon was letting passengers in Omaha , before becoming one of the famous St. Louis steamboats in the 1960s .

= = = Railroads = = =

In 1863 , ground was broke near Miller 's Landing on the Missouri River for the First Transcontinental Railroad . Along with local financier Edward Creighton , George Francis Train was the promoter who was mostly responsible for the city landing the railroad . He was made rich from its convenient placement near land that he owned ( near Deer Park . The Union Pacific Railroad has been headquartered in Omaha since its inception in 1867 . In 1872 , Union Pacific opened the first [ railroad ] bridge across the Missouri to Omaha .

= = = Trails = = =

In the 1860s and 1870s , the city became a major outfitting center for the major trails that went across Nebraska , including the Oregon , California and Mormon Trails . Jobbers Canyon was built in Downtown Omaha for the purpose of outfitting these migrants . Stagecoach lines had arrived by 1858 , including the Local Stage Coach Company in 1857 , and the Western Stage Company which began its easterly and westerly routes in Omaha . The Pony Express and Wells Fargo lines maintained offices in the city .

= = = Streets = = =

Omaha had terrible streets through the late 1880s , which caused many residents to believe the city was not progressing appropriately . This lack of responsiveness by the city government was caused by property owners throughout the city who did not want to pay for improvements . On rainy days stagecoaches would sink up to their hubcaps , and residents wore knee @-@ high boots to wade through the mud , and at times rivers ran through the streets .

= = = Public transportation = = =

In 1867 Ezra Millard , Andrew J. Hanscom , and Augustus Kountze formed the Omaha Horse Railway Company to provide horsecar service in the city . By the late 1870s the line had five miles ( 8 km ) of track , 10 cars , 70 horses , 20 employees and 495 @, @ 000 passengers annually . The Omaha Cable Tramway Company was the city 's only cable car , and started in 1884 and ended in 1895 after consolidating with the Horse Railway as the Omaha Street Railway Company . In 1896 the new company disbanded as competitors moved in . An electric car was built by Eurastus Benson

between Omaha and Benson specifically to promote that suburbs development during this time .

= = 1880s - 1950 = =

= = = Streets = = =

In 1880 only a quarter mile of Omaha 's estimated 118 miles ( 190 km ) of streets were paved . In 1883 Andrew Rosewater , brother of newspaper owner Edward Rosewater , became city engineer and began an ambitious project to modernize city streets . By 1886 the city had 44 miles ( 71 km ) of paved streets , including asphaltum , Colorado sandstone , Sioux Falls granite and wooden blocks .

In 1889 Horace W.S. Cleveland proposed that the city of Omaha develop a series of " broad ornamental avenues , known as boulevards or parkways " designed " with a tasteful arrangement of trees and shrubbery at the sides and in the center " , similar to the comprehensive plans of European cities in the mid @-@ 19th century . His plan was accepted by the city 's Parks Commission , resulting in the construction of Omaha 's Prettiest Mile Boulevard in 1892 , and dozens of other boulevards in the through to the present . Today , Fontenelle and Lincoln boulevards are among the many remnants of the early plan ; Sorenson Parkway is a modern version of the historical plan . Saddle Creek Boulevard , currently known as Saddle Creek Road , which was originally the westernmost boulevard in the system .

= = = Bridges = = =

While the Union Pacific Missouri River Bridge was the first railroad bridge across the river , the 1 @,@ 400 @-@ foot ( 430 m ) Douglas Street Bridge opened in 1888 as the first road bridge . The East Omaha Bridge was originally opened in 1893 , and rebuilt a decade later in 1903 . The Mormon Bridge was first attempted to be built across the river in 1932 , and failed ; it was finally successfully constructed in 1952 . The South Omaha Bridge opened in 1936 . The Knights of Ak @-@ Sar @-@ Ben operated the Douglas Street Bridge as a toll bridge from 1938 to 1947 . The bridge was removed in 1968 . Traffic was carried by a new girder bridge built in 1966 for I @-@ 480 . The Saddle Creek Underpass , over which is the Dodge Street Overpass , was completed in 1934 by the Works Progress Administration . Over 1 @,@ 175 cubic yards ( 898 m3 ) of dirt were excavated to lower Saddle Creek Road sufficiently to pass under the overpass , which is still in use today . Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 , it is part of the Bridges in Nebraska Multiple Property Submission as well .

= = = Highways = = =

In 1889 Otto Baysdorfer built Omaha 's first auto , an electric car . The " Ottomobile " was the first of nearly a dozen car manufacturers eventually started in Omaha . The Ottomobile weighed 265 pounds , had two cylinders , and could achieve a speed of 15 miles per hour . An " Auto Row " developed along Farnam Street and featured dealers , garages , and parts stores .

The original Lincoln Highway in Omaha was designated through Omaha in 1913 . Crossing the Missouri River into Omaha on the old Douglas Street Bridge , it traveled west on Dodge Street , then meandered across the state following section lines . Some of these sections were built exclusively to accommodate the highway . Important buildings on the Lincoln Highway in Omaha included the Hupmobile Building , the Nash Building at 902 @-@ 912 Farnam and 901 @-@ 911 Douglas streets , and the Blackstone Hotel at Farnum Street and 36th Street . Additionally , the Rose Blumkin Performance Arts Center at 20th and Farnum Street and the Farnum Street Automobile Row , from 30th to 40th Streets were both important landmarks .

In 1930 49 @,@ 128 autos were registered in Omaha ; ten years later 65 @,@ 489 were registered to drive on local streets .

After trucks became popular in the 1910s , the Omaha Stockyards grew exponentially . Cattle ,

hogs and sheep were shipped cheaper by truck than by trains . In 1919 27 % of livestock at the Stockyards was shipped by truck ; by 1940 's it rose to over 75 % . In 1955 the Stockyards became the biggest livestock distribution center in the United States , and almost all of the cattle was shipped by truck .

= = = Airport = = =

The aforementioned Baysdorfer provided Omaha with another invention by successfully flying an airship in the city in 1889 . In 1929 a bond was passed that would construct the Omaha Municipal Airport in East Omaha . This was thought to embody the city 's hope for the future ; however , air travel did not become popular in Omaha until the 1960s . The land was swampy and had to be filled in with silt taken from the bottom of Carter Lake . Northwest Airlines started service between Minneapolis and Omaha in 1930 .

In the late 1940s Eppley Airfield was completed . In 1959 the airport was named for Eugene C. Eppley , the Omaha Eppley Hotel magnate . Eppley 's estate donated \$ 1 million to be used to convert the Omaha Municipal Airport into a jet port .

= = = Public transportation = = =

The Omaha and Council Bluffs Railway and Bridge Company was founded in 1886 in order to span the Missouri River . In the late 1880s the city had five franchise companies providing transit services within city limits . They included the Omaha and Southwestern Street Railway Company , which provided services to Kountze Place , Dundee , Bemis Park and the Gold Coast neighborhoods . Short lines ran with limited purposes : one went only to a baseball field at the end of its line , while another ran to and from a park .

By 1901 local businessman Gurdon W. Wattles consolidated several of the older horsecar and cable car companies to create the Omaha and Council Bluffs Streetcar Company , which later became the Omaha Traction Company . After receiving a 30 @-@ year franchise from the city of Omaha , the company established a mass transit system that covered the entire city , including commuter trains and interurbans .

= = = = Traction Company strike = = = =

Wattles was vehemently opposed to unionization , and in 1909 fought strikes in favor of unionization with hired policemen and rampant violence . By 1934 the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees was organized in Omaha .

However , by April 1935 the fragile truce between pro @-@ open shop management and pro @-@ union forces broke . A long , violent strike ensued . Strikebreakers were hired , and within four days the company rolled out heavily fortified streetcars , complete with windows covered by heavy wire and armed guards on board . While few cars attracted passengers , the cars encountered little resistance . The company resisted calls for arbitration from the Omaha City Council , and continued employing strikebreakers . In early May violence broke out , with rifle attacks , violent beatings and bombings across the city . In June riots broke out throughout the city with mobs burning streetcars , looting and two deaths . The city government lost control of the violence and called in the National Guard , which sent 1 @,@ 800 troops while Governor Robert Cochran declared martial law and ordered the streetcars to stop running . After the governor intervened and Wattles allowed arbitration , a number of agreements were made . However , no changes occurred , and strikebreakers stayed on the job . The violence ended , court cases ensued , and the situation slowly faded away . The Omaha Traction Company never unionized .

= = = Omaha Belt Line = = =

The Omaha Belt Line was formed in 1883 by the Union Pacific ; some shady dealings by Jay Gould

brought the Belt Line into the control of the Missouri Pacific Railroad by 1885 , when it was constructed with Union Pacific materials under the control of the MoPac . Stations along with Line included the Florence Depot , Webster Street Station and the Ralston Station . Operated by that company until the early 1960s , today the Line is largely abandoned , with a section redeveloped into the recreational MoPac Trail .

= = 1950 @-@ present = =

= = = Streets = = =

Starting in 1950 the city has continuously developed and redeveloped its major streets , particularly relying on them for east @-@ west traffic . Major east @-@ west thoroughfares in Omaha include Fort , Ames , Maple , Blondo , Dodge , Pacific , Center , L , Q and Harrison streets . Major north @-@ south thoroughfares in Omaha include North and South 24th streets , 30th street , Saddle Creek Road , and 72nd , 84th , 90th , and 120th streets . South 10th Street is important in South Omaha .

= = = Highways = = =

The first long segment of Interstate 80 in Nebraska to be opened was a fifty @-@ mile section between Dodge Street in Omaha and the West Lincoln interchange in 1961 .

Construction of the freeway in North Omaha in the 1970s faced many hurdles . Built immediately after the construction of I @-@ 480 , this 4 @-@ mile ( 6 @. @ 4 km ) section was originally supposed to be designated as Interstate 580 . However , the city refused to invest the additional money the federal government required in order to gain the designation . Coupled with social unrest in the 1970s , the highway is blamed for causing a 30 percent housing loss and major increase in crime . The freeway became the route of U.S. Highway 75 and is known locally as the North Freeway .

Today , Omaha is well connected to the Interstate Highway System . The city has eleven highway exits along Interstate 80 . From that Interstate drivers can connect to Nebraska Highway 50 , US 275 / NE 92 , I @-@ 680 and I @-@ 480 / US 75 . Continuing north , I @-@ 680 connects with I @-@ 29 near Crescent , Iowa and reconnects with I @-@ 80 near Neola , Iowa ; I @-@ 480 cuts through Downtown Omaha to connect with I @-@ 29 in Council Bluffs , Iowa . The North Freeway also veers from I @-@ 480 , and in 2005 , the Nebraska Department of Roads began a project to bring the I @-@ 480 / US 75 interchange up to Interstate standards . Construction is expected to be complete in 2009 , and it is unknown if the North Freeway will receive an Interstate designation upon completion of the project .

There are a number of important arterial roads throughout Omaha . U.S. Route 75 comes south through Omaha from Fort Calhoun along North 30 Street , North Freeway , I @-@ 480 and Kennedy Freeway , exiting through Bellevue . U.S. Route 6 crosses into the city from Council Bluffs on I @-@ 480 , also called the Gerald R. Ford Freeway in honor of the Omaha native son . It then follows Dodge Street , until it intersects South 204th Street , when it runs south towards Gretna . Nebraska Highway 64 assumes the route of the former Military Road northwest out of Omaha , following Maple Road and West Maple Road to converge with US 275 at Waterloo . US 275 becomes Nebraska Highway 92 after crossing the South Omaha Veterans Memorial Bridge , following Missouri Avenue , which then becomes " L " Street . At South 132nd Street , at which point it veers northeast to follow the old Mormon Trail along Industrial Road when it joins West Center Road , crossing the Platte River and continuing westward .

In 2005 a portion of the Lincoln Highway in Omaha was listed on the National Register of Historic Places .

= = = = Traffic monitoring = = = =

Beginning in fall 2007 there will be more than 30 traffic cameras operating on Omaha area freeways , including one at I @-@ 80 near Gretna and another on West Dodge near 120th Street . Operated by the Nebraska Department of Roads , the sensors and cameras are not used to catch speeders or for other traffic enforcement . The state also operates an extensive traffic operations center that utilizes the cameras to monitor Omaha traffic patterns . Similar to traffic monitoring centers in Lincoln and North Platte , the one in Omaha is the biggest and has the greatest capability to provide traffic information .

= = = Public transportation = = =

The Omaha Traction Company , which operated as the Street Railway Company , changed its name to the Omaha Transit Company when streetcar service ended in the city in 1952 . After World War II Omahans preferred their automobiles and new highways . When the Urban Mass Transit Act of 1964 was passed , Omaha 's private transit companies were not able to apply for federal subsidies available to public transit operators . The Omaha Transit Company ceased operations on June 30 , 1972 , when the City of Omaha assumed authority for public transportation in the city . City Transit Lines , another private company in Omaha , went out of business on that day as well . The Metro Area Transit Authority was created by the Nebraska Legislature , consisting of a five @-@ member board appointed by the mayor and confirmed by Omaha 's City Council and the Douglas County Commissioners . It acquired the assets of the Omaha Transit Company and selected assets of the City Transit Lines of Council Bluffs , along with more than \$ 3 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 in federal funding . The Authority operates today as Metro Area Transit , or MAT .

Today the Authority supervises the level of service , miles and hours of operation within Omaha , and maintains individual service contracts with local authorities outside Omaha . Currently , MAT has three contracts , including the cities of Council Bluffs , Bellevue and the Tri @-@ Communities of Ralston , LaVista and Papillion .

MAT recently completed three new transit centers , which function much like airport hubs . Located at Benson Park , Westroads Mall , and Metro Community College in South Omaha , they are designed to bolster the city 's public busing needs . These join existing centers in Midtown and North Omaha .

= = = Light rail = = =

In recent years the city of Omaha has grown exponentially , and with a renewed focus on public transit , there have been plans for new streetcars and light rail in the city , including a movement initiated by former mayor Hal Daub , which in a 2003 City Council action , failed to reach approval by only one vote . The currently proposed streetcars would cost \$ 55 million and run in a 3 @.@ 5 @-@ mile ( 5 @.@ 6 km ) loop through Downtown Omaha and NoDo . It would cost about \$ 2 million per year to operate and would serve almost 7 @,@ 000 passengers in its first year . One route would run the cars from Creighton University near 20th and Webster streets , proceeding east to 10th Street , passing by the Qwest Center and moving south to Jackson Street in the Old Market . After that it would then move west to 16th Street and then north to Farnam before returning to 10th Street .

= = = Air = = =

Today Eppley Airfield sits on 2 @,@ 650 acres ( 10 @.@ 7 km<sup>2</sup> ) and handles approximately 400 flights a week . There are two concourses that hold 20 gates . The airport handled more than 4 @.@ 4 million passengers in 2007 , and as of September 2008 , Southwest Airlines is the largest carrier handling approximately 24 percent of passengers . United is the second @-@ largest carrier , handling approximately 19 percent of passengers . Currently all regularly scheduled flights from Eppley Airfield terminate within the United States .

Airlines serving Omaha include American , Delta , Frontier , Southwest , United and US Airways .

== Trails ==

Omaha was completely devoid of trails leading up to early 1989 . That year the city began developing trails , and since then the city of Omaha has developed approximately 67 miles ( 108 km ) of paved recreational trails , and another 35 miles ( 56 km ) of trails are scheduled for completion within the next eight years .

Paved and unpaved trails and paths are used for recreational and commuter purposes throughout the city . Popular among bicyclists , runners , hikers and recreational walkers , these trails are included in comprehensive plans for the city of Omaha , the Omaha metro area , Douglas County , and long @-@ distance coordinated plans between the municipalities of southeast Nebraska .

The Missouri River Pedestrian Bridge will connect Miller 's Landing to Council Bluffs in 2009 . A riverfront trail will run the length of the river from the South Omaha Bridge to N.P. Dodge Park .

== Water traffic ==

An anomaly in the city 's transportation is the River City Star , a passenger excursion paddleboat that sails between Omaha and Council Bluffs . The boat is docked at Miller 's Landing near the Qwest Center , near mile marker 617 on the Missouri River .

Marinas for public usage are operated by the Omaha Parks and Recreation Department . Dodge Park , located in North Omaha , has 326 slips , while the new Riverfront Marina in Downtown Omaha has 31 . Levi Carter Park , which has a long history as a water haven , offers non @-@ restricted boating for jet skis , recreational boating and water skiing . No wake boating allowed available at Lake Cunningham , Standing Bear Lake or Zorinsky Lake ; however , these lakes offer opportunities for sailing , fishing and pleasure boating . Cunningham Lake offers a small marina where rental boats are available .

The Port of Omaha was located downtown where Miller 's Landing is now . In addition to handling outbound barge shipments of grain , it also handled inbound shipments of steel and asphalt .

The Omaha District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates from the city .

== Image gallery ==