

# Northeast Radial status unsure

By John Hopgood

Question: What is the status of Lincoln's controversial Northeast Radial?

Answer: The same as it was two generations ago—up in the air.

The Northeast Radial, a proposed four-lane diagonal road designed to run from the downtown business district to 27th street, has been a topic of heated debate since the 1940s. The Lincoln City Council is still debating whether to build the road and their delay is affecting the growth plans of the UNL and the nearby Malone and Clinton neighborhoods.

If the proposal to build the radial passes, the road will cut through property owned by the university and may limit growth to the east.

One way the radial would benefit the university is that it would take commuter traffic off of 16th and 17th streets, which run through the downtown campus. Such a plan is in keeping with the university's projected goal of establishing a "walking campus" with parking on the perimeters.

UNL officials will not publicly come out supporting or opposing the radial. However, Ron Wright, vice chancellor for business and finance, said the university has "served notice" to the city that if the road is to be built "it (the university) would prefer that it be built east of 21st Street." The university's long-range master plan calls for growth east to 21st Street. Wright's suggestion for constructing this radial would be in keeping with the plan.

The UNL master plan, developed in 1967 by a Texas planning firm, was designed to accommodate a student population level of 25,000 and sets no timetable for completion. At present about 23,000 students attend UNL.

Although the plan does not specify exact locations, it calls for the construction of two more residential halls and a new student center.

### Full approval deadlocked

Wright pointed out that the university "is hemmed in on three sides" by railroad tracks bordering the campus on the north, Interstate 80 on the west and downtown Lincoln on the south.

Even though slower growth is projected for the 1980s, UNL officials hope to keep the option of eastward expansion open. The construction of the radial "would in fact be the fourth boundary," Wright said.

The radial first was proposed in the late 1940s as "the diagonal." As the city grew during a growth boom in the 1950s and early 1960s, so did the design plan for what

then came to be known as the "Northeast Highway." The "Northeast Highway" became the "Northeast Radial" when support for the plan dwindled during the recession of the early 1970s.

In 1977, the city council scrapped the portion of the radial east of North 27th Street.

This year, the city council was deadlocked, voting 3-3 twice on a motion to kill the plan.

The Radial Reuse Task Force recently has completed a draft report which encourages "a serious re-examination" of plans to build the radial.

### 19th street corridor

The City-County Planning Commission suggests using the 19th Street corridor instead of 22nd street because of possible hazards to pedestrians trying to cross the radial to get to the new Malone Center, which will be built at 20th and U streets.

At present, the city council is awaiting the report of a task force evaluating the environmental impact of the radial west of 27th Street, and then will have a public hearing on the issue.

Whether the city council will make a final decision on the roadway this year is uncertain. However, many believe the city will vote down the proposal within a year. Among those is City Council Chairman John Robinson.

"There is not a lot of support for the radial and there is a slim possibility that it could be scrapped," he said.

Council member Eric Youngberg is against the roadway. But he favors the 19th Street route in favor of the 22nd Street plan if the radial is built because "it would take fewer homes and businesses."

Joe Hampton, another council member, said that a basic reason for the plan is to provide a link between the city and UNL's east campus. He suggests that the university is being ignored by the council and puts part of the blame on the university itself.

"I think the university could have been more forceful itself," Hampton said. I think there's been a woeful lack of dialogue between the two entities (Lincoln and the university). For instance, the city council and the NU Board of Regents have never sat down and had a meeting," Hampton said, adding that he didn't think the radial would be destructive.

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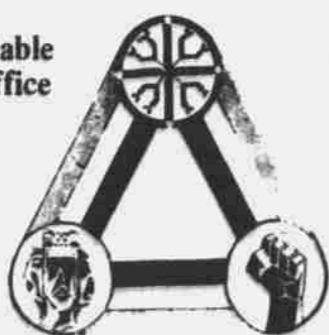
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