

# Construction blueprints to better highway, campus

## Train delays may be derailed with plans for overpass

By BRIAN CARLSON  
Staff Reporter

On a frigid Tuesday morning, Ryan Drapal sat on a shuttle bus waiting to ride to a class on the other side of City Campus. Two coal trains had just come screaming past the parking lot where he waited across from the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

For Drapal, a freshman English major, the trains that pass north of the 17th and Holdrege streets intersection often delay his shuttle rides.

"Sometimes it makes you late. Sometimes you're there extra early," Drapal said. "You can't time out when you need to be there."

Jim Akin, shuttle bus driver, agreed. "It's annoying," he said. "For a university of this size to be held back by a railroad is kind of hard to explain. But you get used to it."

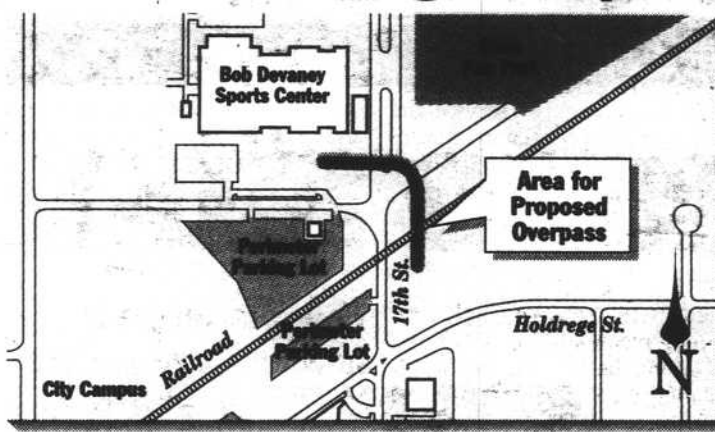
If motorists and pedestrians wait a few more years, they might not have to wait behind lights and crossbucks any longer. A proposed overpass would run traffic over the tracks and get more students to class on time.

In response to concerns for transportation safety and convenience in a large section of Lincoln surrounding the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, a group of local organizations plan to improve the area's infrastructure over the next six years.

The City of Lincoln, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District have begun work on a program known as the Antelope Valley Major Investment Study.

At the center of the area being studied is the intersection at 17th and

## 17th and Holdrege Overpass



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

Holdrege streets, which borders two City Campus perimeter parking lots and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. One proposal is the construction of a vehicle overpass in the area.

An average of 50 trains per day use the tracks, resulting in frequent delays for motorists and pedestrians.

Study participants say the proposed overpass, which would be between 14th and 17th streets, would even traffic flow and prevent dangerous behavior by delayed travelers.

In recent years, UNL and Burlington officials have received reports of students climbing on or through rail cars while a train was at rest and blocking traffic.

Kim Todd, campus planner, said, "While the time delays are an inconvenience, the real concern is that when people are in a hurry, they do things that are not in their best interests."

Rick Haden, city operations manager, said if the project succeeds in separating railway and street routes, it would alleviate some transportation and safety problems.

"There's a strong desire to provide some kind of grade separation," he said, which means placing vehicle and pedestrian routes on a different level

than the train tracks.

Haden emphasized that the Antelope study is a long-term program and construction might not start until 1999.

Mike Martin, a Burlington Railroad spokesman, said the company would participate in the study.

"We know there are a lot of activities going on around the university, and we're doing everything we can to keep the trains flowing in and out of town," he said. "So we're supportive of any efforts to build grade separation."

Plans for construction are still sketchy, and it is unclear what effect the building of an overpass would have on UNL parking lots and buildings.

Tad McDowell, parking services manager, said his department is preparing for construction. When it recently paved a parking lot near the Devaney Center, only a thin layer of asphalt was used in case construction requires changes. The gravel lot along 17th Street also was left unpaved.

The lots are also along the shuttle bus routes, and the trains can make a 20-minute wait turn into 45 minutes.

"It would be nice to have some relief from the trains," McDowell said. "It prevents us from developing some kind of regular schedule."

## Work will obstruct Interstate 180 throughout two-year long project

By ERIN SCHULTE  
Senior Reporter

After Thanksgiving break, finding your way back to campus might not be so easy.

The Department of Roads begins its \$14.9 million project reconstructing the Interstate 180 overpass near Ninth and Q streets on Dec. 1, and will not finish until around August 1998.

During the first year, the Phase 1 plan will close southbound Interstate 180 from the Cornhusker Highway interchange to O Street. Passenger vehicle traffic will be rerouted to 11th Street and Cornhusker Highway, then south through Sun Valley Boulevard intersection to 10th Street.

Phase 2, which runs December 1997 to August 1998, will close the northbound lanes of I-180. Traffic will be rerouted to 10th Street, then west on Cornhusker Highway to I-180.

Officials at the Department of Roads aren't trying to sugar-coat the difficulties the construction will cause. "I think initially it's going to be a pretty big deal," said Allan Abbott, the department's director/state engineer.

Abbott said construction was scheduled to start during the heavy-traffic holiday season because Cornhusker football games cause worse traffic jams in Nebraska than any holiday dinner with the family.

Construction was scheduled so it would disrupt as few football games as possible, he said.

The bridge, built in 1963, has deteriorated to the point where replacement is crucial, Abbott said, and those wishing the project could be put off just have to accept the inconvenience.

"Did we have to do it this year? No, it could have been next year," Abbott said. "Whenever you start, you've got the problem."

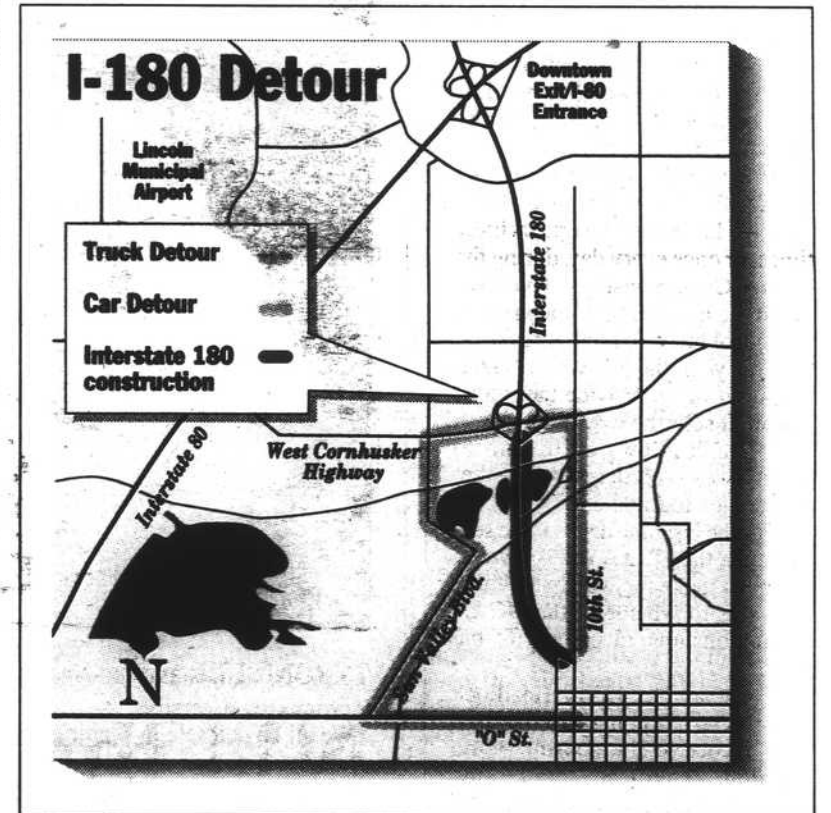
Hawkins Construction Co. of Omaha will be working as quickly as it can to get the project done — the workers have incentive.

"The contractor gets so much for doing the job, and so much for each they finish before we predicted it could be done," Abbott said.

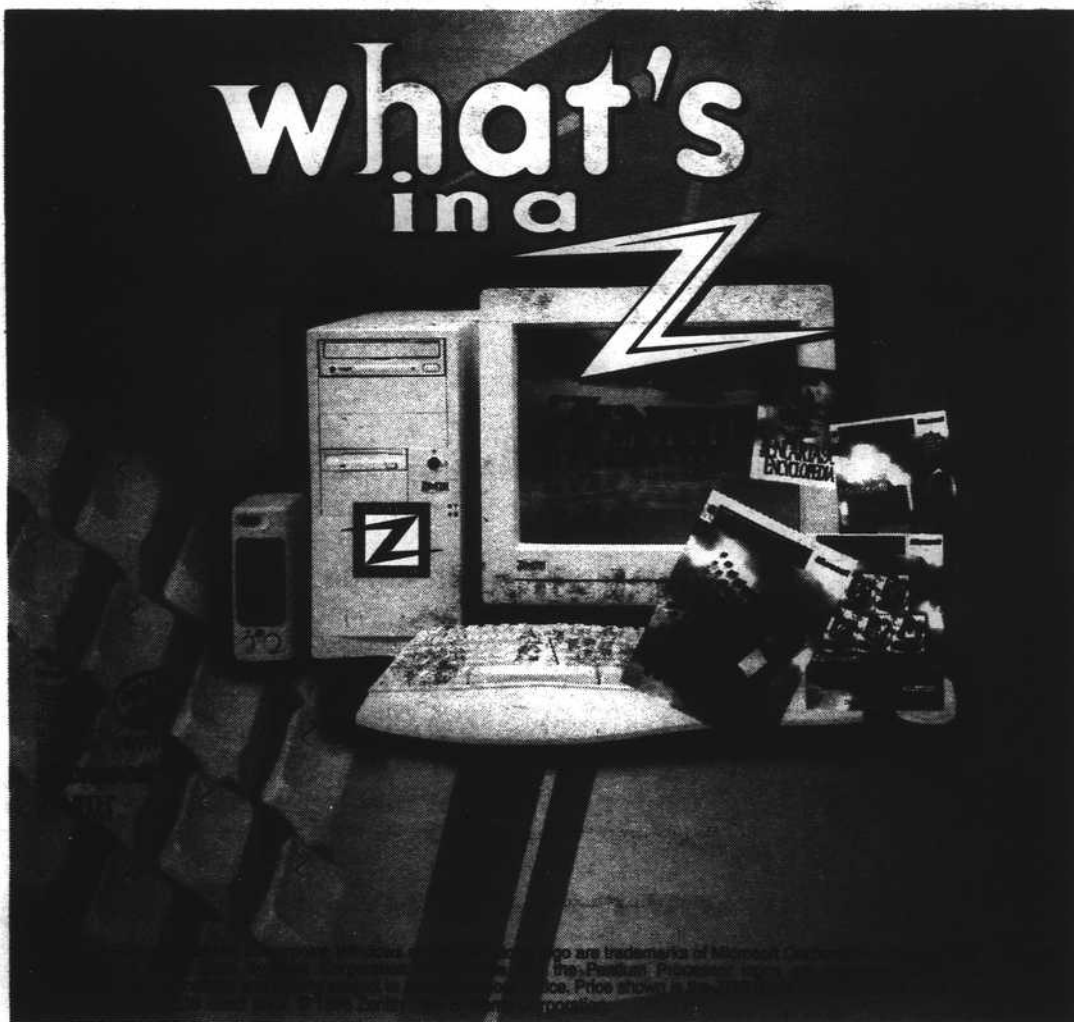
The Department of Roads has spent the last year working with the City of Lincoln to plot out alternate routes, make signs directing motorists where to go, and planning other construction so it won't interfere with I-180 plans.

But while the construction may make getting out of Lincoln more difficult for holiday travelers, the same department is trying to make travel easier for motorists heading west on Interstate 80 by installing changeable message signs.

The department purchased 13 signs, at \$26,700 each, to alert drivers of winter storms, accidents and other problems that would cause road closings.



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