

Photos by
Lane Hickenbottom/DN

(from top to bottom)

TO BOARD any of Lincoln's StarTran buses, just go to a bus stop and wait. This stop is at 14th and N streets.

UNL STUDENTS can pick up free bus schedules and passes at the Nebraska Union's information desk.

BRUCE ROBBINS takes the helm of the O Street Shuttle. The shuttle's route serves Southeast Community College, Gateway Mall and downtown Lincoln.



Get on the Bus

Students learn to adapt to life without cars

By JEFF RANDALL
Senior Editor

For those students who are unfortunate enough to find themselves stranded in Lincoln without a vehicle to call their own, all hope is not lost.

Unlike many other cities where a car is an essential part of life, Lincoln is small enough and concentrated to the point that most points of interest are within walking and/or biking distance. But there are the occasional sites that are just a bit too far to reach without motorized transport.

That's where StarTran comes in.

As Lincoln's only regular source of public transportation, StarTran has long been many students' only option for cross-town travel.

Aaron Harper, a senior business major at UNL, said he had learned to appreciate Lincoln's bus system since arriving here three years ago. Originally from Omaha, Harper said he had used buses there only on rare occasions.

"I think my car broke down when I was a junior in high school, and I had to use the buses to get back and forth to work," he said. "But now, I've pretty much grown accustomed to relying on them every day."

Sylvia Daniels, an undeclared sophomore, said Lincoln's buses were a welcome change from the public transportation she became familiar with while living on the East Coast.

"It's nice to ride a bus without worrying about some drunk guy falling asleep on your lap," Daniels said. "But I suppose that has a lot to do with this being a smaller town than Boston or New York."

Besides convenience and the lack of parking worries, many students said StarTran's

free service for UNL students, faculty and staff played a major part in their decision to ride the city's buses.

Larry Worth, transit manager for StarTran, said the three-year-old program has been a success for both StarTran and UNL. Under the plan, UNL pays StarTran quarterly to provide the free service — which includes intercampus shuttles as well as regular bus service.

"We have no way of knowing exactly how many students use the buses now compared to three years ago, but we and the university both feel that several students are taking advantage of this offer," Worth said.

The students' only complaints were about StarTran's lack of service to some of Lincoln's more distant locations.

"I think you can get to places like Holmes Lake and Pioneers Park if you try hard enough, but it would take a lot of transfers, and I don't know if it's even worth the hassle sometimes," Harper said.

But being a public entity, much like the city's fire or police departments, means that StarTran faces a limited budget and could not provide as many expanded routes as one might expect, Worth said.

"We'd like to push our boundaries further so we could provide service to more areas," he said, "but the reality is that we have to keep our established services running and that doesn't leave a lot of extra money for anything new."

Most students said StarTran was doing as well as could be expected; and, Daniels said, students' expectations shouldn't be excessively high when they consider how much they pay for the services they receive.

"For us, it's a free ride," she said. "So I have a hard time complaining about anything."