

Letter from the Editor

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Mike Corbett
Editor and Publisher

The Polar Bear Express is operating this year, but it's in Kokomo instead of Noblesville. You can't blame the Indiana Transportation Museum for taking its business where its welcomed instead of where its rejected. The ITM operated the popular Christmastime excursion train for years between Noblesville and Fishers. I've been walking on 8th Street when the train went by, waved to the kids as they enjoyed what may well have been their only train ride ever. It was pure magic.

Hamilton County residents gladly paid upwards of \$35 a ticket to give their kids this unique experience, and the excursion sold out at that price for years. But due to the misguided ambitions of a couple of local mayors, the Polar Bear Express has moved to Kokomo this year. That's right, a thriving business that operated here for years without public subsidy is forced to another community by our own elected officials, who don't see any value in providing an entertainment attraction of this type.

Logansport, on the other hand, does. In fact, its throwing a parade to welcome the Nickel Plate to its community. So the Polar Bear Express, based in Noblesville for years, is operating between Kokomo and Logansport this year, giving Howard and Cass County residents an opportunity that we no longer have. That experience, that revenue, that cultural icon is going elsewhere because we can't see the potential for excursion train rides on our own railroad track.

The controversy is too complicated to explain in detail here but, in a nutshell, the cities of Noblesville and Fishers want to tear up the Nickel Plate Railroad tracks (the second oldest railroad line in the state) to build a hiking/biking/walking trail. The issue is currently before a federal panel that will decide if the cities can "railbank" the right of way and take out the tracks.

Converting rails to trails is a common practice but authorities usually target abandoned rail lines. In this case, the line was still in use, so our local leaders kicked ITM (self-supporting) off the tracks to make way for the trail, which will cost the cities millions.

I am an ardent trails supporter and an avid bike rider. I love trails. We need more of them in Hamilton County and I will support well-conceived and well-designed plans that go where people want to go. This is an ill-conceived idea that doesn't seem to meet any market demand, and is sacrificing a popular and thriving non-profit business that has been contributing to our quality of life for more than a generation.

Pick your issue: government overreach, tourism, cultural preservation, love of trains, economic development, taxes, free enterprise, government transparency or just plain bullying. This episode has elements of all of these.

To pick just one that applies specifically to the mission of this magazine: our local governments ought to encourage private enterprise, not throttle it with heavy handed political tactics that deprive our residents of a valuable, irreplaceable and cherished public asset.

To learn more, check out the website www.savethenickelplate.org.

Happy Holidays. See you around the county,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Corbett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Editor and Publisher
mcorbett@hamiltoncountybusiness.com
317-774-7747