

# Choo-choo into Grand Island **NEBRASKA** for great train watching!

**Train Viewing:** Come watch the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe fly over the Union Pacific Railroad.

The **Union Pacific** cuts through the heart of the city, the original transcontinental mainline. All of the newest locomotives can be seen here, and some old ones as well, including Centennial #6936, the three E 9's, Challenger #3985 and Northern #844. The UP runs about 90 trains every 24 hours.



**Families watch as Union Pacific's #844 rolls through town, a regular sight in Grand Island.**

**Burlington Northern-Santa Fe** rails travel flyover the UP just east of downtown Grand Island. BNSF is predominately a coal-hauler with its mainline heading into the Powder River Basin of Wyoming. However, double stacks, unit grain and manifest trains make up about 25% of the traffic on this line. The Boeing train runs weekly from Topeka, Kansas to Seattle, Washington, hauling fuselages for Boeing. The BNSF line through Grand Island handles approximately 75 trains each day.

The **Nebraska Central Railroad** diesel fleet calls Grand Island home. The unmistakable red and white locomotives make for fine photo opportunities. Several trains a day travel to and from Grand Island on the area's #1 shortline.

Grand Island's hotspot is known as the diamond, where the BNSF flyover crosses the UP tracks. This spot is located just east of downtown Grand Island at 3rd and Oak Streets. Park south of the southern-most gravel road next to the UP mainline and west of the BN overpass because it is less likely you will be bothered by railroad police here. Keep a safe

distance from the rails at all times since the trains can appear out of nowhere at any time. The speed limit at this spot for the UP is 50 mph for coal trains and 70 mph for double stacks and other high priority trains. The BNSF runs at 50 mph for most trains since they have a pretty good grade to climb to get over the top of the UP.

Another scenic spot to watch Burlington trains is northwest of Grand Island along Highway 2. It's double tracked hi-speed railfanning at its best!

For pure UP then Gibbon Junction is where you want to go. It is 25 miles west of GI on Highway 30. Gibbon is the busiest UP railroad spot in the world. The double track UP main between Council Bluffs, Iowa and North Platte, Nebraska splits here to form the Marysville Subdivision. There are 160+ UP trains per 24-hour period.

**Railroad Displays:** A gift from the Union Pacific, Stuhr Museum's Railroad Town depot was originally located in Oconto, Nebraska, and believed to have been built in 1890 or 1895. It is a depot common to small communities of its era, a one-story, 18 by 50 foot wood frame structure divided into three areas: a small passenger waiting room, a center office with a ticket window

and a baggage/freight room. The Marshal's Office is a tiny depot that was once located in the Adams County village of Hansen on the old **St Joseph & Grand Island line**.

Also on display at Stuhr Museum are Union Pacific Engine 437, along with the Bosselman-Hoch Family Union Pacific Boarding Car, a fully restored Florence & Cripple Creek #65 coach and a UP caboose. During restoration of the Bosselman-Hoch car, the original markings of the short-lived Grand Island & St Joseph Railroad were uncovered.



**The hottest spot in Grand Island for train watching is the flyover**

**Grand Island Railroad History:** Grand Island has been a railroad center since the Union Pacific Railroad first reached here in July 1866, building westward as part of the original transcontinental railroad. 146 miles west of the starting point of the Union Pacific at Council Bluffs, Iowa, Grand Island became a major engine and crew change point. A depot and locomotive maintenance shops were erected and enlarged over time as the city steadily prospered from the commerce and convenient transportation provided by the railroad. Grand Island's business trade territory was expanded as other Union Pacific subsidiary main and branch lines were built in the 1879-1891 period, connecting Grand Island to both distant cities and local rural markets.

Grand Island literally became a crossroads for rail traffic in 1884 when the **Burlington & Missouri River Railroad** reached Grand Island pushing a line northwest from Lincoln to Billings, Montana (This later became the **Chicago, Burlington & Quincy**). The Union Pacific and Burlington crossed at grade on the city's east side for many years.

In 1885, the UP locomotive shop in Grand Island was converted to freight car construction and maintenance, a role it maintained for many years. UP's Grand Island roundhouse provided local employment as workers carried out repairs and maintenance on the steam locomotives. At its peak in the 1920s, the roundhouse consisted of 40 stalls where engines could be serviced.



**Stuhr Museum is built around the theme of a railroad town out on the prairie.**

To eliminate the old crossing of the two lines at grade, which had reportedly become the busiest railroad intersection in America, a new

Burlington

overpass of the Union Pacific main line was completed with the first train over the new line on July 27, 1995.

The fact that Grand Island was, and remains, a railroad town has drawn the interest of railroad enthusiasts from around the world. Many have come to observe and photograph the large number of freight trains that pass through the city on a daily basis.

The city's former Chicago Burlington & Quincy Depot remains, now called the Plum Street Station. This 1911 passenger depot was saved and renovated by the Hall County Historical Society. It retains the original floor and wall tiles, woodwork and bricks. The passenger building is now a reception hall, small parlor & restrooms while the freight building contains the Tri-City Model Railroad

Association's intricate model railroad display depicting Grand Island railroads circa the 1940's. Sadly, none of the UP depots remain including the stunning 1918 depot, which was considered one of the finest small city depots in the USA. **Coming Soon:** (Projected 2012) The public's fascination for watching trains along the busy Union Pacific main line across Nebraska has both continued and grown in the years since Otto Perry and his contemporaries visited the state. Currently, the Great Plains Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society has taken the lead in promoting development of a railroad park and viewing area southwest of where BNSF's coal corridor flies over the Union Pacific. An ex-Union Pacific caboose has been donated to this

project. In cooperation with

city and private organizations, the Chapter is working toward the creation of a railroad viewing platform as depicted in the above illustration by Grand Island architect Ron Lukesh. The platform will permit the safe viewing of UP and BNSF train operations by the many railroad enthusiasts that visit the Grand Island area from across the US and the world.

(Projected 2014) BNSF Railway plans to add a second main track through Grand Island in a three-phase, \$90 million project, to be completed in 2014. When Burlington Northern elevated its line through town in 1994-95 it was only single track, creating a 10-mile bottleneck from near Phillips to McDonald, west of Webb Road in northwest Grand Island. Work on the first phase, from near Phillips to just east of Stuhr Road, should be complete next year, said Andy Williams, BNSF regional public affairs director. Phase two, from east of 10th Street to just west of Webb Road, should be complete in 2013. Construction on the first two phases is expected to start later in 2011 and will include grading and bridge work. Phase three, through Grand Island, is to begin in 2013 and be completed by 2014. The project requires 15 bridges and/or underpasses, including a new bridge over the Platte River about 35 feet south of the existing one.



**This is Ron Lukesh's illustration of the proposed viewing platform.**

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CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

2424 S Locust St, Ste C

800-658-3178

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