

Efficient Amtrak deserves government transportation subsidies

By DUANE CHATTIN SPECIAL TO THE COURIER & PRESS

Saturday, July 4, 2009

It is time to offer Americans energy-efficient and economical transportation options by developing passenger rail routes for Hoosiers, including those living in Southwestern Indiana.

That is why I was surprised to see a writer from the Cato Institute object to modest funding to develop passenger rail ("Don't get railroaded by FRA's plan," June 24).

How Americans travel throughout the country has long been dictated by massive government subsidies. The development and maintenance of the interstate highway system is one example. Another example is government financing for airports and the Federal Aviation Administration's programs that subsidize the airline industry.

Why should passenger rail be expected to turn a profit while that measurement is missing from discussions about highway and airport subsidies?

Did you know that highways received more last year from the federal government than Amtrak has received since it was founded in 1971?

In fact, the federal grant to Amtrak last year (\$1.4 billion) was the cost of just a few highway interchanges.

Speaking of costs, it should be noted that carbon dioxide emissions per passenger mile for Amtrak (0.45) is less than half of an aircraft (0.97) and an average automobile (1.10), and less than one-third of a sport utility vehicle (1.57), according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

A government concerned for our well being should provide more support for transportation options that are fuel-efficient and produce the least pollution.

I recently completed a round-trip aboard Amtrak from Indianapolis to Baltimore. The train was near 100 percent capacity thanks to the patronage of families, retirees, college students and people such as myself who were heading to conferences.

I am also a regular passenger of Amtrak trains that connect Carbondale to Chicago. Ridership is steadily growing on this route thanks to the affordability, convenience and enjoyability of passenger rail transportation.

Given its success and popularity elsewhere, as well as the need to reduce our use of foreign oil and conserve our environment, I believe it is time to support the

development of passenger rail transportation that connects Evansville with Chicago—the third largest metropolitan area in the country.

This would be a major benefit for our communities, our universities, our tourism and commercial industries, not to mention the growing number of retirees seeking convenient travel options.

Passenger rail transportation is economic development that we can believe in. It is also an investment well worth making.

Duane Chattin is a Vincennes, Ind., City Council member.



© 2009 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online