

## Senators debate merits of high-speed rail

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It's perhaps not too surprising that Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) is not the biggest fan of President Obama's [push](#) to expand high-speed rail. But that doesn't mean he won't get the hard sell from his Democratic colleague, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

At a Senate Budget Committee hearing on Thursday, Sessions, the panel's ranking member, said the government didn't have the money for rail projects. But Whitehouse pressed the Alabama senator to keep an open mind on the idea, likening high-speed rail to the development of highways.

"You'd find that it was actually worth spending that money because it carried follow-on economic effects that were worth far more than it," Whitehouse said.

In the end, Whitehouse might have made some progress with Sessions — but appears to still have quite a ways to go.

"I recognize the Northeast could justify it more than a lot of places I see it's being projected to go," Sessions said to Whitehouse.

"That's all I needed to hear," Whitehouse said, to scattered laughter in the hearing room.

The exchange came after Sessions asked witnesses whether federal policy had encouraged states to spend money they might have otherwise kept in the coffers.

Chris Edwards of the libertarian Cato Institute then brought up high-speed rail, which the Obama administration has made a priority. According to Edwards, the federal government may help out with the construction for high-speed rail, but not the operating cost.

"These cities and states are going to be left down the road with these, you know, very fancy new systems when bus systems would have been cheaper, with lower operating costs, and now they're stuck with all this expensive infrastructure," Edwards said.