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Construction

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High-speed rail 'boondoggles' not worth the cost, critic says

by [Brian Johnson](#) Staff Writer

High speed rail projects are on the drawing board throughout the country, but not everyone is ready to climb on board.

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Randal O'Toole is among the most outspoken critics. A senior fellow with the Cato Institute, O'Toole says high speed rail projects carry high capital and operating costs, while doing little or nothing to relieve pollution or congestion.

"The Obama high-speed rail plan will carry the average American less than 60 miles a year," O'Toole noted in an e-mail. "That's supposed to relieve congestion? No way. What it will do is encourage the cities on the high-speed rail lines to build more local transit boondoggles.

"No matter what they say, no high-speed rail in the U.S. will ever pay its operating, much less capital costs," says O'Toole, who estimates that the "true price tag" of high-speed rail will jump to \$500 billion when "politicians in Midwest and other parts of the country" get their true high-speed trains.

O'Toole, who has written extensively on high-speed rail, including an October 2008 analysis titled, "High Speed Rail, the Wrong Road for America," says all taxpayers will pay for the projects, but relatively few will ride the trains.

Some projects involve the use of existing freight tracks to save on costs, but those tracks are capable of handling trains that go no faster than 110 miles per hour – as opposed to "true" high speed rail, which is 140 to 150 miles per hour, he says.

Moreover, he noted, once those trains start rolling, they will likely push existing freight traffic from the rails to the streets – exacerbating the congestion problem on the nation's highways.

"It is worth noting that only 28 percent of U.S. freight goes on the highways, while 60 percent of Japanese freight and 72 percent of European freight is on the highways, because those countries have dedicated their rail systems to passenger [service]," O'Toole noted.

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