



## Rail travel requires high subsidies

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Regarding Saturday's letter titled "Embrace rail or prepare for \$8 gas," yes, gasoline costs close to \$8 per gallon in many European countries, but not due to supply and demand.

According to the December report by Victoria Transport Policy Institute, the price of wholesale gasoline is relatively the same in Europe and the United States. The combined federal and state taxes on a gallon of gas is no more than 17 percent of the pump price in any state in our nation, while in many European countries 70 percent of fuel cost is tax.

While traveling through Europe by rail can be a wonderful experience and an efficient way to travel, fares don't come close to covering the operating cost of Eurozone passenger rail. In 2006, the last year statistics were available, European governments subsidized the rail industry to the tune of \$73 billion, according to the European Environment Agency.

In the United States that same year, the federal government subsidy for Amtrak was about \$237 per thousand passenger miles. In 2008 the per passenger operational loss for Amtrak was \$32 for each rider (Amtrak stats from Cato Institute report).

Before we put taxpayers on the hook for something that will be used by only a small minority of travelers, let's put all the numbers on the table and put sentimentality aside.

— Ben Olson III, Wisconsin Dells