

Inmates in Sacramento asylum at it again

[Dr. Joseph Sabella](#)

This time it's a "high-speed" rail. My analysis relies on a fascinating book published by The Cato Institute, "The False Promise of Green Energy," written by four expert authors.

The first thing to note is that special rails to accommodate the fast trains will not be built. Why? To save money. That's really funny.

This means that this latest \$10 billion (and that's just for starters) mega boondoggle will be a low-speed system. I remind your readers that the Senate's approval of the sale of \$10 billion worth of bonds for the project is 62.25 percent of the presently projected state deficit of \$16 billion.

Of course, since we are selling bonds, (we're already in debt to our eyeballs) it won't show in the budget — except eventually for the enormous amount of interest we will have to pay. But that's down the road, where we've kicked the can, so we can ignore it for now.

But take heart, there is a silver lining: The projected \$16 billion deficit is sure to grow much larger, so the percentage cost of the bonds will be proportionately less than

62.25 percent.

Our science-ignorant-lawyer-politicians, at all levels of government, are enamored with mass transit for many reasons, but unfortunately, none of them are true.

Let's get to reality. Among the alleged benefits of this ridiculous scheme are:

- Less energy consumption per passenger mile
- Reduction of carbon emissions (that man-made global warming bugaboo again)
- Lower transportation costs
- Less road congestion
- I suppose, nice dining cars?

Energy: More will be consumed in the construction of the system than can ever be retrieved. We have some examples; the first is Portland's North Interstate rail line, which is estimated to save 23 billion BTU (British Thermal Units) per year per passenger mile.

However, its construction consumed 3.9 trillion BTU. To retrieve this it would take 172 years — exceeding the life span of the system by about three.

And this does not include the energy used to mine and extract metals, fabrication and transportation of building materials such as steel, cement, paint, wood (logging and sawing), tiles and much, much more.

The second example is Seattle's North Link line, which will allegedly save 346 billion BTU per year by 2015 and 200 billion BTU in 2030. However, the energy cost of its construction will consume 17.4 trillion BTU, not retrievable until 2095. As in the Portland example, it exceeds the system's life span.

Carbon emissions: The story is the same as for energy. Since rail systems require the use of bus lines to feed them, more buses will be needed. Moreover, since many people will continue to use their cars to get to the train stations (more energy and carbon emissions), bus ridership will be less than was the case when buses themselves were the means of transport.

Thus, BTU and carbon emissions per passenger mile will increase. Also, since passengers will need transportation at their destinations, they will rent cars, take cabs or use public transport, all of which will be repeated when they return home. Still more energy will be consumed and more carbon will be emitted.

It is obvious that without having to check in and go through security (same as for flying), driving will be quicker and more convenient than taking the train, just as it is at present to go from San Francisco to Los Angeles by car, instead of flying.

Lower costs: The proposed California system will never pay for itself and will require enormous, perpetual subsidies. Anyone ever heard of Amtrak?

Less road congestion: Sure. Since the country (and especially California) is bankrupt, the system will never be completed (fortunately), and because our state's population continues to grow, there will be more cars than ever.

But there's a silver lining; it's possible that the current out-migration of high earners and businesses could increase and offset any increase in road congestion.

The facts presented here are actually easy to understand, but politicians don't want to be bothered by facts. It's fun to spend money we don't have, especially when it comes out of the pockets of hapless, tax-paying citizens.

The main reason for the senate's ill-advised passage of the bond sale was to assure the continuing flow of federal money for the project. However, the federal funds will not be forthcoming, because the Federal Reserve is running out of ink.

One last thought: I'm looking forward to riding the low-speed line from Fresno to Modesto, so I can tour the Gallo Winery.

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