

Other Views: It's time to end Amtrak funding (Feb. 6)

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I love passenger trains, but I don't think other taxpayers should have to subsidize my hobby.

Train travel has declined for good reason:

Trains are slower than flying, less convenient than driving, and far more expensive than either. Per passenger mile, Amtrak fares average twice as much as airfares or the cost of intercity driving. Despite higher fares, Amtrak revenues cover only about half the costs of the three trains it operates between Florida and New York/Virginia.

In 2010, taxpayers spent more than \$110 million subsidizing the Florida trains. The round-trip subsidy to each New York-to-Orlando train passenger is close to \$500.

By comparison, airline ticket fees pay for airports and air traffic control, and highway user fees such as gas taxes and tolls pay almost all the costs of federal and state highways. Taxpayer subsidies to someone driving or flying between New York City and Florida are less than \$25 round trip.

Nor do trains offer environmental benefits. Amtrak's diesels use as much energy and emit as much pollution as cars in intercity travel.

Despite much larger subsidies, Amtrak brings in less than 0.5 percent of the people visiting Florida. Florida can find better ways to attract people at a much lower cost.

Rather than expand Amtrak, we should defund it and let private companies operate trains where people are willing to pay full costs.

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