

High speed rail a losing bet for Arizona

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Outcome all too predictable

By Byron Schломach

The Arizona Department of Transportation has released a draft rail transportation report laying out its plans for high speed rail in Arizona. While the department's plan is a comprehensive document covering all types of rail-based transportation, the sections on high speed rail appear to get the most attention, complete with schematics and maps. The evidence, though, points to high speed rail as a boondoggle waiting to happen.

In 2008, Californians narrowly approved a \$10 billion bond issue to help build high-speed rail, with spur lines, between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Costs have already risen 10 percent, even with spur lines eliminated, and the promised \$55 ticket price has almost doubled to \$105.

Cost overruns and inadequate ridership are all-too-predictable when it comes to passenger rail projects. A project of the Pew Charitable Trusts has [estimated](#) Amtrak is subsidized to the tune of \$32 per passenger ticket. A [study](#) by the Reason Foundation in 2008 predicted much higher costs for the California rail project when it is finished and cited overly optimistic ridership estimates by proponents of the project.

Passenger rail seems to be especially vulnerable to the trifecta of special interest advocacy groups, politicians willing to bet federal taxpayer money, and hungry contractors ready to take that money. Meanwhile, our neglected road system continues to do the lion's share of the transportation work. People demonstrate daily they are willing to pay for roads with tolls and taxes on fuel, tires, trucks, and autos. Passenger rail, on the other hand, needs subsidies in its every incarnation. Arizona would be wise to let this train pass.

Learn More:

The San Diego Union-Tribune: [California high-speed rail: The next stop is bankruptcy](#)

National Public Radio's *Marketplace*: [Taxes picking up tab for Amtrak losses](#)

Arizona Department of Transportation: [State Rail Plan March 2011](#)

Cato Institute: [High Speed Rail is Not "Interstate 2.0"](#)

About the Author



Dr. Byron Schломach is an economist and serves as the Director of the Goldwater Institute's Center for Economic Prosperity. He has 15 years of experience working in and around state government. He has researched and written on tax and spending policy in two states in addition to studying transportation, health care, and education policy. Schломach's writings have appeared in National Review Online, Business Week online and numerous Texas and Arizona newspapers. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University.