

Democrats Want To Eliminate Air Travel, And It's A Disaster In The Making

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Politicians love to play with trains. And your money.

In Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's "Green New Deal," she suggests that high speed rail should be built out across the country and used in place of air travel. But California's "bullet" train is just one of several examples that demonstrate why tax dollars should not be wasted on these types of projects.

California's bullet train, which was intended to run between Los Angeles and San Francisco, was originally estimated to cost \$33 billion. However, the one-party state of California recently decided to pull the plug on this undertaking due to the fact that after 11 years and basically nothing to show for it, the real cost of the bullet train had climbed to \$98 billion in state and federal tax dollars.

A round-trip flight from Los Angeles to San Francisco can be purchased for \$149, and the flight takes 90 minutes. The bullet train was an expensive non-solution in search of a problem.

Meanwhile, some politicians in Mississippi, a predominantly Republican state, think it just might be a good idea to shovel taxpayer money to a proposed passenger train in the Southeast. As in California, this proposal — formally known as the Gulf Coast Rail Project — would soon turn into a massive taxpayer boondoggle.

Unfortunately for taxpayers in Mississippi, the Gulf Coast Rail Project is shaping up to be the same disaster. Given the California example, it is much harder to pretend ignorance.

While the total cost for this project, which calls for two daily passenger trains to run between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama, is hidden, taxpayers will be on the hook for long-term operational and maintenance costs in addition to the infrastructure enhancements, including new train stations.

Estimates have shown that a one-way rail trip on these passenger trains would take more than 3 hours, and would require a subsidy of \$180 per passenger. Today, a person wanting to travel between New Orleans and Mobile can get a ticket on Megabus, a 2.5-hour trip, for \$14. For the \$180 subsidy, the state could give 12 free bus tickets per passenger. In fact, hiring an Uber, a 2-2.5 hour trip, would often be less expensive than \$180.

Recognizing the longer length of the train trip, it is reasonable to assume that it would be the least popular choice of commuters. In fact, the rail carrier's own analysis projects the Gulf Coast

Rail Project would attract just 26 riders per train. That is just two more than there are “blackbirds baked” in Mother Goose’s pie.

It gets worse. The Gulf Coast Rail Project would put jobs and potential new jobs at risk. The passenger trains would run on a line that is now being used by freight trains. Since passenger trains get preference over freight trains and the line is mostly single tracked, the Gulf Coast Rail project will interfere with freight traffic industries along the Mississippi Coast. How many companies would decide to build new factories along a hobbled freight rail line?

Mississippi lawmakers should learn from the California bullet train fiasco, as well as the lessons closer to home: similar state-supported trains that once ran between New Orleans and Mobile in the past were discontinued because they were slower, less reliable, and more expensive than other existing modes of transportation.

As Randal O’Toole, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and author of *Romance of Rails: Why the Passenger Trains We Love Are Not the Transportation We Need*, has exposed:

Today, air travel is far less expensive than train travel, with airfares averaging under 14 cents a passenger mile, barely more than a third of Amtrak fares even though Amtrak receives much bigger subsidies, per passenger mile, than the airlines.

There is no justification for wasting millions of hard-earned tax dollars on yet another expensive, inflexible and unneeded