

Latest Illinois high speed rail delay not surprising

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It's going to take a little longer to get the Amtrak trains in Illinois to go a little faster. But one rail expert says people shouldn't get too excited for when high speed rail does, eventually, launch in Illinois.

It's now going to be sometime in 2018 before Illinois said Amtrak will be ready to unleash high speed rail along the corridor between Chicago and St. Louis.

The Illinois Department of Transportation last week said a delay is pushing back the launch date until after the first of the year.

But Randall O'Toole, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, said people shouldn't get their hopes up for 110 mile-per-hour service — not in 2018, and not ever.

"Currently, the trains between Chicago and St. Louis go an average of 52 mph," O'Toole said. "They're promising to get them up to 63 mph. Maybe."

O'Toole said much of the problem lies in the nostalgic feelings for passenger trains.

O'Toole added that is silly for two reasons. One, the government didn't spend about \$2 billion in Illinois to prop up the vinyl record or typewriter industry. And two, there already are quick, easy and cheap ways for people to get from Chicago to St. Louis.

"IDOT admits that 99 percent of the traffic between Chicago and St. Louis is by either automobile or air," O'Toole said. "So, when they say, 'We're going to give people more options.' Yeah, but they're not going to give people good options. They're going to give them expensive options."

Illinois started work on the high speed rail corridor in 2010.