

# The Ledger

## Let's get on board with high-speed rail

Jim Hightower

November 20, 2015

Practically every wealthy nation today is making major investments in building high-speed rail networks to transport their people: Japan, Canada, France, Russia, India, England, Morocco, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Italy, China, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Brazil, Germany, South Africa, Turkey and more. But not us, the wealthiest nation, with dozens of cities dotted across a continent with millions of people who need fast, convenient rail connection.

Why are we stuck in traffic on roadways and runways and left with a pokey, out-of-date rail system while nations with a small fraction of our resources — such as Morocco, Poland and Turkey — are cruising on HSR networks? Because our leaders sold us out to corporate hucksters who fed us ideological lies. Their fairy tale was that mass transit is creaky, inherently inefficient, and socialist — and that Americans deserve the independence that comes from a one-person-one-car doctrine.

As early as the 1930s, giant corporate consortiums formed to buy out more than 100 of America's very effective networks of streetcars and interurban train systems. Not to run them, but to rip out the tracks and pave over the rail right-of-ways to make roads.

Likewise, corporate profiteers mounted a new offensive in the 1990s to undermine the higher-speed potential of Amtrak's Acela trains, hiring such Koch-funded front groups as Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation and Reason Foundation to spread hokey "analyses" that brand Amtrak as a slow train to collectivist hell. They also bought trainloads of politicians, who're still promoting the fabricated studies and talking points of the corporate-cabal to derail HSR proposals.

Despite attempts to kill the notion of a national passenger rail system, trains are only getting more popular. Here are just a few things that HSR would offer our country:

- HSR construction creates a start-up economic boom (from the manufacturing of trains and equipment; the construction of everything from bridges to stations; the installation of high-tech control systems; the generation of renewable energy to power the electric engines; the development of new businesses to serve rail passengers, and more) and would be a sustained source of good, permanent jobs running and maintaining the network.

- HSR is a boon for passengers, providing a competitive alternative to airline rip-offs and traffic congestion. Travelers get access to more cities, safer and more comfortable rides and the ability to work or just relax on the road.
- HSR trains are powered by electricity, thus they substantially reduce consumption of grossly polluting fossil fuels.
- HSR crisscrossing America would be a monumental achievement by and for our people, on a par with the 10-year moon-landing effort launched by President Kennedy or the interstate highway system initiated by President Eisenhower. It would be a history-making project, worthy of a nation with unsurpassed wealth and under-used talent. Creating such a treasure for future generations would re-engage our people's can-do spirit, and it just might rekindle some sense of national unity.

The U.S. is in the caboose of transportation innovation because special-interest politics continue to thwart our national will, leaving you and me with a rickety, malfunctioning rail system that is a national embarrassment. It's unforgivable that corporate and political leaders have intentionally failed to maintain, much less improve, the quality of America's rail infrastructure for future generations. And the cowardice of Congress critters, who take special-interest money to oppose the best policies for the common good, is not only shamefully corrupt; it's a firing offense.

That's where we come in. High-speed rail offers such huge benefits for us that we need to push it to the center of our policy demands, especially with a national election cycle already on us. To learn more, contact the National Association of Railroad Passengers ([www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)) and US High Speed Rail Association ([www.ushsr.com](http://www.ushsr.com)).