



Show-Me Institute study slams high-speed rail proposal

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By [Steve Walsh](#)

A new study takes a close look at high-speed rail in Missouri and concludes Missourians would not get much of a return on their investment. The study was conducted for the Show-Me Institute, a St. Louis-based free-market think tank, in response to federal economic stimulus proposals to expand high-speed rail services throughout the United States.

Randal O'Toole, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, authored the study for the Show-Me Institute. O'Toole says Congress has called for \$8 billion to be set aside for high-speed rail, and Missouri would only be eligible for a slice of that - hardly enough to cover the costs of constructing or upgrading. O'Toole says upgrading 250 miles of track between Kansas City and St. Louis would cost about \$875 million.

"That is just an awful lot of money and it is just to upgrade tracks so that passenger trains can run at 90-110 miles an hour on the same tracks as freight trains," said O'Toole in an interview with the Missourinet. "If you wanted to build brand new track and have true high-speed trains, trains going 150-200 miles an hour, it would cost you a lot more - billions or tens of billions of dollars in Missouri."

The suggestion is that any additional costs would have to be absorbed by Missouri and other state governments.

"We can be sure they're going to be coming back to local, federal, and state taxpayers and saying, 'Give us more money,'" said O'Toole.

As far as O'Toole is concerned, it doesn't really make a lot of sense.

"Here you've got a proposal, essentially, to spend about a billion dollars," said O'Toole. "And all you're going to get is trains that are now going 79 miles an hour and they might go 90 miles an hour, instead, or a little bit faster."

Why would the trains be limited to speeds only reaching 90 miles an hour?

"Burlington Northern Santa Fe, which runs a lot of the tracks west of Chicago and St. Louis, says they don't want trains running faster than 90 miles an hour on their tracks," said O'Toole. "Any trains faster than that

will be incompatible with their freight trains and they don't want it. So, here you have the federal government saying they will only fund things that run faster than 110 miles an hour and the largest railroad in the country is saying we're not going to accept anything faster than 90 miles an hour."

The study shows that ridership on the Amtrak line between Kansas City and St. Louis at just 29 percent capacity, leading O'Toole to say the demand does not exist in Missouri. But would ridership exist if high-speed rail were to become a reality in Missouri? O'Toole says figures for the Northeast Corridor, in which high-speed rail does exist, would indicate ridership would not rise all that much.'

"Some of the projections put together by advocates of high-speed rail assume that they will fill 70 percent of the seats," said O'Toole. "Amtrak doesn't come close to filling 70 percent of the seats - even on its high-speed trains between Boston and Washington. It fills only about 55 to 58 percent of those seats."

O'Toole suggests if the federal government wants to provide Missouri and other states with money to upgrade passenger train service, it should allow the states to use the money to improve safety and for purposes other than expanding high-speed rail.

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