

Cato Institute: High-speed rail network would be a counter-revolution as poor keep wealthy mobile

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by Jonathan Oosting | MLive.com

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File PhotoThis April 2, 2009

photo shows an Amtrak passenger train.

A [new briefing](#) from the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank, attempts to put the breaks on plans for a national high-speed rail network that would include a hub in Detroit.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm [announced last month](#) Michigan applied for \$800 million of the \$8 billion in federal stimulus money the Obama Administration earmarked for the project.

That money would be better spent on safety improvements to existing rail lines, according to the Cato senior fellow Randal O'Toole.

O'Toole, like Obama before him, compares the high-speed rail network to the national Interstate system.

While the government has devoted \$8 billion to the project, O'Toole says the actual cost will around \$90 billion, significantly more than the Interstate Highway System would have cost in 2008 dollars.

[Cato Institute, Sept. 9](#): The entire FRA plan calls for about 8,500 miles of moderate- and high-speed rail routes in the United States. At \$3.5 million per mile, this would cost nearly \$30 billion. The \$8 billion that Congress has already approved and \$5 billion that the

administration has requested over the next five years would not pay for even half of this.

In California and possibly Florida, however, the FRA plan calls for building entirely new tracks suitable for operating trains faster than 120 miles per hour. In 2005, the Florida High Speed Rail Authority estimated that construction of a rail line powered by gas-turbine locomotives would cost between \$22 million and \$27 million per mile.

The network would reach 33 states and 65 of the nation's largest urban areas and require rural would-be riders to first drive to a major city, but the project will be primarily funded by general taxpayer money.

Because of this, O'Toole says, it will be a sort of "counter-revolution: a step backwards to a time when only the wealthy had mobility and when low- and middle-class people worked hard to keep the wealthy mobile."

The briefing also says the average American would ride the rail system less than 60 miles per year, compared to 4,000 miles of Interstate travel per American in 2007.

O'Toole even takes on the network's primary promise: energy efficiency.

Amtrak claims its trains are more energy efficient than driving, but it bases this claim on an assumption that the average automobile has just 1.6 occupants.³⁹ In fact, autos tend to carry more people in the intercity travel that would compete with high-speed rail. An independent analysis for the California High-Speed Rail Authority found that intercity autos average 2.4 people.⁴⁰ This makes Amtrak only 8 percent more energy efficient than light trucks and 15 percent less energy efficient than cars.

State officials said they should know sometime in the fall if they will receive the federal stimulus funding, which would be used to restore tracks, renovate and rebuild train stations and other projects. Granholm said the ultimate goal is for the tracks to support 110 mph trains that can reduce the trip from Detroit to Chicago from 6 hours to 4 hours.

Some, like Quentin Kopp of the California High Speed Rail Authority, say it's time for the U.S. to catch up with Europe and Asia.

"Once you've been on high speed rail, whether it's France or Japan or Spain or Germany - you never forget it," [Kopp told CBS last month](#). "And you realize that this is a technology whose time has come. As a matter of fact, it came in the last century. But it sure is 21st century for the United States of America."

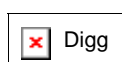
As [Bill Shea of Crain's Detroit notes](#), the Cato Institute report is likely to draw boos and catcalls, especially the conclusion: "High-speed rail is a technology whose time has come -- and gone. What might have been useful a century ago is today merely an anachronism that would cost taxpayers tens or hundreds of billions of dollars yet contribute little to American mobility or environmental quality."

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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Posted by jayjaykay on [09/10/09 at 12:32PM](#)

"Coming from the wrong side of the tracks" - "Being born on the wrong side of the tracks" - will be back in vogue from the lips of elite limousine Liberals.

The Elite will continue to ride in limo's.

While many on rail will need to sit next to and be exposed to criminals, dope fiends, rapists, pedophiles, bums, backsliders, kooks and morons from insane asylums (including delusional Liberals ranting about fantasies).

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Posted by ryly on [09/10/09 at 12:56PM](#)

"Conservatives" are idiots and morons. Flush Limbo is a fat doper. Michael Moore rules.

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