

the corner

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Refilling the Tank [\[John Hood\]](#)

With some of us having just returned from lengthy Memorial Day weekend roadtrips, now might be a good time to catch up on some of the best new think tank work on transportation policy:

- The Cato Institute's [Randal O'Toole](#) has given President Obama's plans for high-speed rail another brutally honest fact-check. Among other problems, the purported air-quality benefits won't materialize:

Amtrak diesel trains are only a little more energy efficient than flying or driving, and pumping those trains up to 110 mph would reduce their efficiency. Because planes and cars are growing 2% more energy-efficient per year, rail would fare poorly by such measures over the next 15 to 20 years.

Moreover, high-speed rail consumes enormous amounts of energy and emits enormous volumes of greenhouse gases. These would cancel out any operational savings over cars and planes.

Interstates paid for themselves out of gas taxes, and most Americans use them almost every day. Rail requires huge tax subsidies and would regularly serve only a small elite. Which is the better symbol for the America President Obama wants to build?

- Not satisfied with traditional measures of transportation efficiency and housing preferences — because they don't support the case for Smart Growth transit and density policies — the Obama administration is coming up with some new transportation/housing index that local planners and activists can use to indict the suburbs and rescue all those suffering Americans who remain trapped there. Writing for the Heritage Foundation, [Alan Pisarski](#) cries foul.
- Remember all that talk about reducing earmarks and other abusive budgetary practices that squander scarce transportation dollars? The Reason Foundation's [Adrian Moore](#) reports that it was just that — talk. There are already some 7,000 requested earmarks in transportation and infrastructure this year, totalling \$136 billion.

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