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 - Small Business Hub
 - Start-Up Summer
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January 21, 2010 11:43 AM EST by John Stossel

THE RAIL SCAM

Besides alternative energy, on my FBN show tonight, I cover government rail projects.

Politicians love spending your money on rail. They claim it cleans the air and reduces traffic jams. Joe Biden said last year: "if you're going to create jobs with a long-lasting platform for the future, it's rail, rail, rail, and rail."

But it turns out that, in most places, rail is terribly inefficient.

Amtrak loses \$32 for every ticket it sells. So few people ride the line from New Orleans to Los Angeles that it manages to lose \$462 per passenger.

The average subsidy per ride on all LA rails is \$10.53, according to data from transportation consultant Tom Rubin. For someone who uses the rail to go back and forth to work every day, that adds up to a subsidy of \$5,369 per year -- enough to lease that person a Toyota Prius for the year.

Biden claims that rail will "protect the environment." But actually, says Randall O'Toole of the CATO Institute, who will be a guest on my show (Stossel, 8pm EST) light rail uses more energy per passenger mile than the average car – twice as much as a Toyota Prius.

Even some of the nation's most lauded rail systems have been a disappointment.

The manager of Portland Oregon's light rail service, James E. Cowen, proclaimed four days after the rail had opened that "the initial response is so tremendous that there is no doubt now that light rail in Portland will be a huge success."

But as Randall O'Toole points out:

"The share of Portland-area commuters who ride transit to work shrank from 9.8 percent before Portland built its light rail to 7.6 percent today. Why? Because the rail lines cost so much that Portland raised bus fares and cut bus service, forcing many former transit riders to take up driving..."

Portland's fastest light-rail line averages 22 miles per hour. Portland's streetcar goes about 7 miles per hour. I am waiting to see a developer advertise, "If you lived here and rode transit home from work, you'd still be sitting on the train."

So far, the Portland rail has cost taxpayers \$1.5 billion.

And Joe Biden is about to take more of your money to build more. Give me a break.

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in October 2009. His show, *Stossel*, airs on the Fox Business Network on Thursdays at 8 p.m. ET
Give Me A Break and Myths, Lies and Downright Stupidity. His "Give Me A Break" commentaries take a skeptical look at a
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