



Published on *Sunshine State News* (<http://www.sunshinestatenews.com>)

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## We Can't Afford This Affair With High-Speed Rail

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Posted: June 30, 2010 3:34 AM



High-speed rail is the lover we dream about but can never, *should* never, have. So elusive, so romantic, so ingrained in us.

It's time to wake up, people. Time to let it go.

The cost of building a high-speed rail network anywhere in America today – and that includes Florida – far outstrips the benefits we hope to gain.

Even with the \$8 billion President Barack Obama dedicated to it in his stimulus package, and the \$1.2 billion Congress chipped in later, high-speed rail – however pretty to look at – is an ugly disappointment.

The thousands of jobs it's supposed to bring? Dribbled out over a vast landscape in this vast country, and over a period of 25 or more years if we're lucky. Where are they? Show me even one.

Economists and scholars and urban planners see past the sex appeal and so should we.

One of them, Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, has studied the supposed environmental benefits, guided by the carbon-emission data used by environmental advocates. According to a *Time* magazine article, Glaeser pegs the annual environmental benefit for a 240-mile high-speed rail line that attracts 1.5 million riders at \$4.2 million, a small return given the billions it would cost to build.

Scholar and economist Randal O'Toole of the Cato Institute showed us that the French and Japanese ride their bullet trains less than 400 miles a year on average. O'Toole estimates an American high-speed-rail network would take no more than 3.5 percent of this nation's cars off the road.

Urban planner Wendell Cox explains that high-speed rail systems don't save time or

money for commuters. Read Alex Tiegen's story on this page ("Optimistic High-Speed Rail Benefits Assailed").

"It takes time for commuters to get to stations, purchase tickets, and wait for trains," Cox points out in the story. "When compared to travel by car, trains do not save time ... What's more, commuters often use cars to get to and from a station ..."

So, there you have it. We build a multi-billion-dollar rail system that doesn't stimulate the economy by providing jobs right now, doesn't save riders time or money and it doesn't take cars off the road either.

Guess what else? When our zippy train network is up and running, we taxpayers will end up subsidizing it.

How do I know? Because Amtrak regularly faces a \$1 billion gap between revenues and expenses, including depreciation. It carries 29 million passengers a year and the per-trip subsidy tops \$30.

If we want to put money into rail transportation -- especially in Florida -- let's put it where people use it -- in our urban centers and along our heavily populated coasts. Never mind bullet trains. Just passenger trains. Passenger trains that link coastal towns up and down the length of the Sunshine State. That's where congestion problems are the most severe. We may still wind up subsidizing the service, but it's where funding makes the most (common) sense.

When you're in love, common sense flies away, I know that. But, really ... get over it.

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