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## LETTERS

### Top-Down Is the Wrong Vision for U.S. Transportation

The top-down transportation planning process advocated by Robert Puentes ("[Move It!](#)" [The Journal Report on Tomorrow's Transport, May 23](#)) is the last thing America needs. It is just such centralized planning that has put our transportation networks, from air-traffic control to highways to urban transit, in disarray.

One of his "visions," for example, is to spend more money on transit to give urban commuters "more transportation choices." But after spending some \$500 billion over the last 40 years to extend transit to ever-more remote suburbs and small towns, transit trips per urban resident have remained virtually unchanged even as per capita urban driving has more than doubled.

Mr. Puentes also supports an infrastructure bank to help fund "critical new investments on a merit basis." But experience has shown that supposedly "merit-based" transportation grants, such as transit "New Starts" and President Barack Obama's high-speed rail programs, quickly become politicized and hugely wasteful.

To restore a functional and efficient transportation system, we need to replace this inside-the-Beltway mentality with a bottom-up process. This means funding transportation out of user fees, not taxes. User fees will make state and local agencies and private transportation providers responsive to actual transportation needs, not the whims of some out-of-touch visionary.

#### Randal O'Toole

*Cato Institute*

*Camp Sherman, Ore.*

Mr. Puentes rightly offers that "we need to stop and think long and hard about transportation" before blindly spending more money, but then goes on to toss out a few well-worn and even slightly ragged-looking chestnuts as his answer. In other words, not much new.

Thinking long and hard about transportation requires thinking long and hard about a whole host of issues, some of them captured by Mr. Puentes, and some not. But the most important thing—and the thing woefully missing from almost all recent discussions of where the nation ought to focus its meager funds—is imagination. We have no compelling vision of transportation in the future.

There are innovative companies busily working to create a world where mobility is a central tenant of both economic vitality and social cohesion, where personal vehicles look radically different, automation is less fantasy and more prototype, safety is proactive and intelligence permeates everything. Without a national vision for transportation—one derived from what we can see coming rather than from what has been—we'll all have little opportunity to benefit meaningfully and systemically from that innovation.

#### Peter B.G. Shoemaker

*Albuquerque, N.M.*

Rather than playing the role of a central planner, governments should concentrate on reducing red tape and facilitating approval of construction permits along with arbitration of conflicts that often stand in the way between developers and local communities.

Federal, state and local governments should optimize future transportation investments by gradually privatizing existing highway infrastructure into toll-based transportation corridors that would bring the real costs of automobile travel to the forefront from beneath multiple layers of taxes. As cities grow, suburbs sprawl and roads become congested. Increased direct costs to commuters will not only encourage urban high-rise developments closer to sources of employment, but will also invite competition to provide cheaper and more efficient alternatives.

Hong Kong is one example of a city with an efficient system of transportation networks, many privately owned and operated, that provide an optimum mix of services to meet the needs of most commuters in the area.

#### Victor V. Mikhaylov

*Alexandria, Va.*

### Voter ID: Vital Shield or a Solution Seeking a Problem?

Kansas Secretary of State Kris W. Kobach misrepresents and omits numerous key facts while patting himself on the back for Kansas's recently enacted voter-fraud legislation ("[The Case for Voter ID](#)," op-ed, May 23). His claim that fraud is a "well-documented reality" is refuted by his own office's records, which reveal only seven cases of alleged voter fraud in five years in Kansas (only one of which was prosecuted).

Last year's disputed district Democratic primary for the Missouri House of Representatives, which Mr. Kobach invoked as an example of fraud, involved no fraud at all, according to the Missouri Court of Appeals. Mr. Kobach's reliance on the Colorado secretary of state's report is also misguided. The report, based on flawed database-matching analysis, yielded only the tepid "conclusion" that it was "nearly certain that 106 individuals are improperly registered to vote." No evidence of voter fraud was produced.

Mr. Kobach's denial of the negative impact of voter ID laws is mistaken; the consequences are both undeniable and substantial. The Brennan Center study estimating that 11% of Americans lack photo ID is based on a national survey and has been corroborated by at least two additional studies and exit poll data from three additional states.

In order to have accurate and fair elections, it is important to have accurate and fair discussions about elections. Mr. Kobach's piece does nothing to further the cause of election integrity.

**Katie O'Connor**

**Jon Sherman**

*ACLU Voting Rights Project*

*Atlanta*

I challenge Mr. Kobach's statement that you can't cash a check, board a plane or buy Sudafed without producing an ID. I live in Wisconsin where Gov. Scott Walker's draconian attempt at changing things will likely see him recalled after next January.

I've never been asked to produce an ID to get a check cashed in my entire life, nor do I have to produce one to get Sudafed from a pharmacy. But I'd just as soon not produce one to board a plane either.

"Election security" is just another attempt by the Republican Party desperately trying to hold onto office as an electorate drifts away. from it.

**Mike Rice**

*Sparta, Wis.*

Will Kansas be the role model then for a nationwide voter-ID surge? Not likely. Democrats are heavily dependent on strong turnout by lower-income and minority voters. Anything that upsets those constituents or appears to be an intentional inconvenience will be vehemently opposed. The fact that some illegitimate votes are cast is thought a tolerable price to pay for higher turnout.

**Matt Hall**

*Gainesville, Fla.*

The critics who are against voter ID requirements are the same ones who cheer ObamaCare, which requires a mandatory national ID health card. Presumably, producing that is no trouble at all for the poor and minorities.

**Robert D'Andrea**

*Spring Lake, N.J.*



### **Even Dropping the Palm Oil Has Issues**

Perhaps the Girl Scouts who object to the use of palm oil in Girl Scout cookies because of concern for the survival of the orangutans in Southeast Asia ("[Cookie Crumbles for Girl Scouts, as Teens Launch Palm-Oil Crusade](#)," page one, May 20) may be more dismayed if the workers on the palm plantations are deprived of a living because of a reduced market for palm oil and have to eat the orangutans.

**Mary Mathis**

*Breezy Point, N.Y.*



### **Time to Look at All Federal Subsidies**

As the organization that perhaps best represents what you refer to as King Corn in your May 24 editorial "[Pawlenty on Ethanol](#)," we want to make it clear that the National Corn Growers Association recognizes, as does Gov. Tim Pawlenty, that it is time to reform federal tax policy toward ethanol, gasoline and all other forms of energy. That's why we're working hard with our peers in the ethanol industry to phase out tax incentives like the ethanol blender's credit and work toward other ways to help the industry grow and consumers break King Oil's monopoly, such as expanding the availability of flex-fuel vehicles and mid-level blends of ethanol to fuel them.

We encourage and expect Gov. Pawlenty to stay true to his word and look at subsidies "across all sources of energy and all industries," as he put it, without singling out an industry important to rural America's economy. Finally, we appreciate Gov. Pawlenty's remarks about the importance of the American farmer and the domestic ethanol industry, and we hope that the Journal will take the entirety of his remarks into account as it writes about ethanol and agriculture.

**Bart Schott**

*President*

*National Corn*

*Growers Association*

*Chesterfield, Mo.*



### **There Are Many Ways To Appreciate Art**

When I held page D7 to the light ("[Art: Painting From Another Angle](#)," by Willard Spiegelman, May 18), I observed not only leaf-like shapes within Carlos Cruz-Diez's "Psychromie 174" but a far more substantial shape: Juwan Howard, the 6-foot-9 Miami Heat forward featured on the back page.

Maybe this wasn't exactly what Mr. Cruz-Diaz had in mind to keep the observer engaged, but it keeps me engaged in reading the Journal's print edition.

**Pam Wells**

*Portland, Ore.*



### Fillmore Did More Than You Think

Regarding Fergus M. Bordewich's review of Paul Finkelman's "Millard Fillmore" ([Bookshelf, May 23](#)): The indictment of President Fillmore is written from the viewpoint of 2011, not 1850. If the compromises of 1850 had not been put in place, the South would have left the Union then, not 11 years later, and would almost certainly have been successful. The president and the leaders of Congress knew this.

The railroads were essential in the North's victory in the Civil War. In 1850 there were only 8,000 miles of track in the U.S.; in 1860 there were over 30,000.

The steam-powered warships that made the blockade of Southern ports successful were not available in 1850. The ironclad, steam-powered river boats which made General Ulysses Grant's victories at Vicksburg and elsewhere possible were not in existence.

The relative economies and population of the North surged far more than those of the South between 1850 and 1861.

The states of Maryland and Kentucky were losing slave population during this period as slaves there were being sold to owners in states farther south. They would probably have left the Union in 1850. Abraham Lincoln said that he could not have won the war without Kentucky on his side.

Lincoln would not have been president in 1850. Who could have matched him?

### Arnold E. Reingold

*Merrillville, Ind.*

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