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HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROJECTS ARE WASTEFUL AND ENCOURAGE CORRUPTION

High-speed trains were rendered obsolete in 1958, six years before Japan opened its first bullet train, when Boeing's 707 entered commercial service, writes Randal O'Toole, senior fellow with the Cato Institute specializing in transportation and land use policy, in his study, "The High-Speed Rail Money Sink." But that hasn't stopped tax-and-spend politicians from proposing billions of taxpayer dollars to be wasted pursuing projects for this 19th-Century technology.

O'Toole points out that rail projects are a source of political corruption as well as a waste of taxpayer dollars. "As with any megaproject, high-speed rail is a tempting target for people who would illegally or unethically divert government dollars to their own political or economic gains."

- **Duluth, Minnesota:** The Obama administration's revised, 2010 high-speed rail plan included a line to Duluth, Minnesota, which has only 120,000 people in its urban area. Not coincidentally, at the time the map was issued, the chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee was from Duluth.
- Amtrak often brags that it carries more people than the airlines carry between New York and Washington, which are 230 miles apart. But it admits that it really has only 6 percent of the intercity travel market in the **Northeast Corridor**, with airlines carrying about 5 percent and the other 89 percent going by highway.
- **Los Angeles–San Francisco:** In 1999, the 520-mile Los Angeles–San Francisco line was projected to cost \$25 billion. The most recent projection is \$100 billion. Even after adjusting for inflation, costs have nearly tripled. California has spent an average of more than \$100 million per route-mile building 220 mph track on flat land. The latest estimates project that the entire 520-mile route will cost \$100 billion, of which \$20 billion is for 120 miles of flat land and \$80 billion is for 400 miles of hilly or mountainous territory. That works out to \$200 million a mile for hilly areas.

- **Seattle-Portland:** Washington State received more than \$830 million to speed up trains between Seattle and Portland. The state estimated that it could reduce the 3.5-hour journey by 10 minutes, effectively increasing speeds from 53.4 to 56.1 mph, which is still not anything close to high-speed rail.
- **Chicago-Quincy-Iowa City:** In 2009, Illinois and Iowa received \$231 million in federal high-speed rail funds plus \$13 million in other federal funds to speed up trains between Chicago and Quincy and start new service from Chicago to Iowa City. At the time, there were two trains a day between Chicago and Quincy, which required 4 hours and 23 minutes to make the 258-mile journey, an average of 58.9 mph. Today, the two trains to Quincy average 59.3 mph, knocking a whole two minutes off their trip. The trains from Quincy to Chicago are one minute faster than in 2009. There are still no trains to Iowa City.

“It’s hard to determine which is greater: politicians’ ineptitude or corruption,” said Jim Tobin, economist and president of the Taxpayer Education Foundation (TEF). “But one thing is certain; this 19th-Century technology is a colossal waste of taxpayers’ hard-earned money.”

Source:

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The High-Speed Rail Money Sink by Randal O’Toole