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AT: Economy

HSR is less efficient than airlines

Barro 6/25

(Josh Barro, “Future of high-speed travel is air, not rail”, JUNE 25, 2012, http://bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/06/24/future-high-speed-travel-air-not-rail/K38lewkqpV0RM3ZvyYphiN/story.html)

High-speed rail, long considered the future of fast medium-distance travel, is in trouble. California’s grand plan for a statewide high-speed network is mired in cost overruns and may never be built. New Jersey has cancelled a planned tunnel under the Hudson River, which would have cleared a key bottleneck in the Northeast Corridor. Straightening out the slow, curvy rail corridor between Boston and New York would be hugely expensive and take years. But there is another option for expanding our intercity transportation capacity at much lower cost: reform of our nation’s airports and airways. By changing the way we charge airlines to use airports, we can get a lot more travel out of the infrastructure we already have — and reduce fares and delays while we’re at it.

Airlines can pick up slack instead of HSR

Barro 6/25

(Josh Barro, “Future of high-speed travel is air, not rail”, JUNE 25, 2012, http://bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/06/24/future-high-speed-travel-air-not-rail/K38lewkqpV0RM3ZvyYphiN/story.html)

The results are absurd. Between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m on a typical Monday, there are 26 scheduled flights from the New York area to the Chicago area. That’s a flight every seven minutes — more frequent than many subway lines. Some of those flights use planes with as few as 75 seats. The situation might not seem as dire at Logan Airport, which isn’t subject to slot controls. But Boston travelers, who suffer as delays in New York radiate outward, would still benefit greatly from reform. Better systems for slotting and pricing would charge essentially flat fees, with only a modest upcharge by weight to account for wear and tear on runways. This would encourage airlines to operate larger planes, fewer times a day. Suddenly, “at capacity” airports like New York’s LaGuardia would be able to serve more passengers with fewer aircraft movements. Even more air capacity can be added by modernizing our air traffic control systems. Planes can get stuck in “traffic” in the wide-open sky because controllers on the ground must move them along pre-defined routes. Air traffic control upgrades are ongoing, but they are moving slowly; repricing airport access could generate more revenue to speed up the job. So why haven’t we done it already? One reason is that the airlines have been resistant to change. The slot system allows incumbent airlines to keep competitors out. Yet fixing all these inefficiencies won’t just help travelers; it’s also a boon to taxpayers. The argument for high-speed rail is that we can’t squeeze more capacity out of our airports: that we need to move Boston-New York passengers onto trains so that Logan can be used for long-distance flights. But we can get more out of Logan as well as LaGuardia without spending countless billions on new infrastructure — if only we are smarter about how we price scarce space.

Cars are the easiest way to get around, no one uses other transport

Davies 10

(Professor Dr. Alan Davies, Urban planner, University of Melbourne. ABC Unleashed. " Common Urban Myths About Transport" http://www.ptua.org.au/myths/popular.shtml.)

Taking Melbourne as a case study, behavioural data shows that most travellers prefer to travel by car and consequently public transport carries less than 10 per cent of all motorised trips within the metropolitan area.... Travellers value their time highly and are prepared to pay for convenience.... It is almost always easier to use the car for the various demands of modern life, like dropping the kids off at childcare on the way to work, shopping at the supermarket, visiting mum and dad on the other side of town, commuting to work in the suburbs or going to dinner or the movies.

AT: Warming

HSR advocates ignore environmental impacts

Sheehan 6/25

(Tim Sheehan, “Farmers who oppose high-speed rail get good legal news”, Jun. 25, 2012, http://www.fresnobee.com/2012/06/24/2886292/farmers-opposing-rail-get-good.html)

Each suit alleges that the rail authority failed to fully address concerns raised in almost 33,000 pages of an environmental impact report for the Merced-Fresno section of the line before approving the route last month. Each seeks an injunction to prevent the authority from building the project. The agency hopes to begin construction late this year in the Fresno area. Raudabaugh described the proposed litigation limit as an affront to the idea of a balance of power in state government: "It's offensive that the executive branch was asking the legislative branch to tell the judicial branch what to do." While it was opposition from environmental groups that apparently turned back the idea, "it is very appropriate that everyone should have access to these [legal] protections, that agriculture can use them just like fairy shrimp or vernal pools or wetlands," Raudabaugh said. "We'd like to see our rights respected just like any other limited resource." Douglas Thornton, a Fresno attorney representing landowners in Madera and northwest Fresno, was also pleased with the change of course: "It means there is an even playing field. It would be very unfair for the government to take its pet projects and eliminate environmental issues that would apply to any other project." The high-speed rail authority has not commented on any of the lawsuits or on the governor's about-face on lawsuit limits.

HSR faces massive environmental problems form construction

LA Times 6/11

(Los Angeles Times (MCT), “Environmental objections line path of California’s bullet train”, June 11, 2012, http://www.joplinglobe.com/national/x1318682835/Environmental-objections-line-path-of-California-s-bullet-train)

LOS ANGELES — The California bullet train is promoted as an important environmental investment for the future, but over the next decade the heavy construction project would potentially harm air quality, aquatic life and endangered species across the state’s Central Valley. Eleven endangered species, including the San Joaquin kit fox, would be affected, according to federal biologists. Massive emissions from diesel-powered heavy equipment could foul the already filthy air. Dozens of rivers, canals and wetlands fed from the rugged peaks of the Sierra Nevada would be crossed, creating other knotty issues. A wide array of state and federal agencies is examining those effects and, over the next several months, will issue scientific findings that could affect the cost and schedule of construction. Beyond the regulators, environmental lawsuits brought by the powerful California agriculture industry are threatening to further delay work.

Oil is still the cheapest energy, HSR can’t compare.

Tutton 11

(Mark Tutton, writer for CNN. CNN World. “How Green is High Speed Rails?” 11/19/11

http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/18/world/how-green-is-hsr/index.html)

One of the main factors is cost. Despite soaring fuel prices, motoring and flying are still expected to be cheaper than high speed rail. If faster rail travel is to become a realistic alternative it must be affordable too.

AT: Solvency

High speed rail costs billions and has no effect on the economy

Rodriguez 9

(Aaron M. Rodriguez, “Doyle’s High Speed Rail Problem: Cost-Effectiveness”, 03 May 2009, http://www.thehispanicconservative.com/Madison/doyles-high-speed-rail-problem-cost-effectiveness.html)

The first pertinent and logical question taxpayers should ask about any local project is, “Does evidence show that the benefits will off-set the costs?” The question is particularly important because all available data suggests that high speed rail costs billions of dollars to create, operates at a steady stream of losses, insignificantly reduces highway traffic, and pollutes the environment nearly as much as planes and automobiles respectively. Let’s look at the facts. In May of 1971, Amtrak was built to provide a rail transportation service to intercity passengers. It was concocted by the Nixon administration because there was a steady decline of private passenger rail services from 1920 to 1970. (The one exception was WWII when rail was used to transport U.S. troops.) Since the time of its inception, Amtrak has lost an average of $500 million a year. This does not include the 2.3 billion dollar infusion it received from Congress in 1998 and 1999. And today, Amtrak is in worse shape than before Congress elected to intervene. In a 1998 audit, it showed that Amtrak lost money on all 40 rail routes that were audited except for 1.

HSR fails to bring in riders, London proves

Tutton 11

(Mark Tutton, writer for CNN. CNN World. “How Green is High Speed Rails?” 11/19/11

 http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/18/world/how-green-is-hsr/index.html)

Secondly, will high speed rail entice people off the roads and short-haul flights? French TGVs and the Channel Tunnel rail link have succeeded, but official calculations estimate that only 16 per cent of anticipated passengers for the London to Birmingham line will have swapped from planes or cars.

High-speed rail is too costly

The Boston Globe 12

(Josh Barro, “Future of high speed travel is air, not rail”, http://bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/06/24/future-high-speed-travel-air-not-rail/K38lewkqpV0RM3ZvyYphiN/story.html, DOA 6/25/12)

High-speed rail, long considered the future of fast medium-distance travel, is in trouble. California’s grand plan for a statewide high-speed network is mired in cost overruns and may never be built. New Jersey has cancelled a planned tunnel under the Hudson River, which would have cleared a key bottleneck in the Northeast Corridor. Straightening out the slow, curvy rail corridor between Boston and New York would be hugely expensive and take years.

HSR Unpopular

Republicans oppose HSR spending

Goozner 12

(Merrill Goozner, “House Puts the Brakes on High Speed Rail”, June 24, 2012, http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2012/06/24/House-Puts-the-Brakes-on-High-Speed-Rail.aspx#page1)

House Republicans, however, are blocking all new grants arguing that repairing current systems is the priority. “Funding should go to existing infrastructure needs rather than unrealistic new high-speed rail lines to nowhere,” the appropriations committee report accompanying the legislation said. The program, now funded by regular appropriations, was axed from the Transportation Department funding bill last week, drawing a veto threat from the president. The effort to cage the TIGER grants is only the latest effort by House conservatives to slow down or eliminate funding for mass transit, freight rail and high-speed rail projects, which they see as a waste of money on “trains to nowhere.” Last February, the initial House reauthorization of the surface transportation trust fund, which allocates the gasoline tax, eliminated the 20 percent set-aside for rail projects that was established by President Ronald Reagan in 1982. Only a revolt by Republican legislators from the suburbs outside New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago forced House Transportation Committee chairman John Mica, R-Fla., to withdraw the bill. Now, with a June 30th deadline looming, the summer road construction season could grind to a halt if Congress doesn’t at least extend the current law. A conference committee led by Mica and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Cal., must wrestle with a set of extraneous provisions attached to the two-year, $109 billion extension pushed by the House. They range from approving the Keystone oil pipeline from Canada to giving utilities more flexibility in how they dump coal ash.

Voters dislike HSR

Koeing 6/7

(Brian Koenig, “California Voters Turn on High-Speed Rail Project”, 07 June 2012, http://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/politics/item/11646-california-voters-turn-on-high-speed-rail-project)

However, despite the purported cost savings, the rail system still relies heavily on shaky federal funding and speculative private-sector investments. "We've seen numbers in the $30 billion, $40 billion, the $90 billion range, and now we're back in the $60 billion range," Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) said at the time. "I think there is understandably both some confusion and skepticism about what is the system going to cost, and then there's the question of where is the money going to come from?" Due to such uncertainty, voters in the state are turning on the project, as a new poll conducted by USC-Dornsife and the Los Angeles Times found that 55 percent of California voters want the $9-billion bond issue — which was approved in 2008 to fund early stages of the rail system — back on the ballot. And a startling 59 percent affirmed that they now would vote against it. While labor unions have been staunch supporters of the project, a sizable 56 percent of union households now oppose the funding plan, the poll added. Even Democrats, the project’s most prominent supporters, have become skeptical, as 47 percent now reject the bond issue. The Times explained that revenue projections and overall use of the high-speed rail are also in question: The poll found that most voters don't expect to use it. Sixty-nine percent said they would never or hardly ever ride it. Zero percent said they would use it more than once a week. Public opinion surveys cannot predict the revenues and ridership a rail service might generate. The poll results raise questions about whether the system would serve as a robust commuter network, allowing people to live in small towns and work in big cities or vice versa. On the other hand, 33% of respondents said they would prefer a bullet train over an airplane or car on trips between L.A. and the Bay Area.

HSR Unpopular

Senate opposes HSR funding, calls inefficient

Horng 11

(Eric Horng, “US House stops high-speed rail money”, Friday, November 18, 2011, http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/local/illinois&id=8436266)

But high-speed rail critics say it's a slow road to waste that is too expensive and impractical. Opponents also argue the environmental benefits of high-speed rail will be offset as automakers are required to make more fuel efficient vehicles by 2025. "Senator Durbin is leading the way for Illinois taxpayers to pay higher taxes in the future, because if he finds the money elsewhere, when the federal money runs out, Illinois taxpayers are going to have to make the payments," said John Tillman, Illinois Policy Institute. For now, though, high-speed rail is money train appears stuck on the tracks.

House republicans oppose infrastructure

GoozNews 6/25

(GoozNews, “The Attack on High Speed Rail”, June 25, 2012, http://gooznews.com/?p=4018)

If House Republicans get their way, though, those grants will be the last time the government awards grants to new mass transit-oriented projects under the program. Now funded by regular appropriations, it was axed from the Transportation Department funding bill last week, drawing a veto threat from the president. The effort to cage the TIGER grants is only the latest effort by House conservatives to slow down or eliminate funding for mass transit, freight rail and high-speed rail projects, which they see as a waste of money on “trains to nowhere.” Last February, the initial House reauthorization of the surface transportation trust fund, which allocates the gasoline tax, eliminated the 20 percent set-aside for rail projects that was established by President Ronald Reagan in 1982. Only a revolt by Republican legislators from the suburbs outside New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago forced House Transportation Committee chairman John Mica, R-Fla., to withdraw the bill. Now, with a June 30th deadline looming, the summer road construction season could grind to a halt if Congress doesn’t at least extend the current law. A conference committee led by Mica and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Cal., must wrestle with a set of extraneous provisions attached to the two-year, $109 billion extension pushed by the House. They range from approving the Keystone oil pipeline from Canada to giving utilities more flexibility in how they dump coal ash.

HSR slashed by democrats

Chris 11

(Chris in Paris, “Senate panel to de-fund high speed rail program”, 9/21/2011, http://www.americablog.com/2011/09/senate-panel-to-de-fund-high-speed-rail.html)

President Barack Obama’s high-speed passenger rail initiative may be unfunded next year after a panel controlled by fellow Democrats approved legislation that contains no money for the program. The Senate Appropriations subcommittee that sets the Transportation Department’s budget approved the spending plan yesterday, said John Bray, a spokesman for the panel. The full committee is scheduled to consider the bill today. The high-speed rail program is “a casualty of the cuts mandated in the debt-limit deal” Obama and congressional Republican leaders struck in August, Senator Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey Democrat and a supporter of the president’s program, said in an e-mailed statement. Lautenberg is a member of the transportation subcommittee.

HSR Popular

Republicans approve of funding train infrastructure

GoozNews 6/25

(GoozNews, “The Attack on High Speed Rail”, June 25, 2012, http://gooznews.com/?p=4018)

The movement got a major boost from President Obama’s stimulus package, which set aside billions of dollars for mass transit and high-speed rail projects. The TIGER grant program, where local communities competed for about $500 million a year, spawned dozens of projects like Normal’s across the country. If continued, the program would be a major boon to economic development along the new or improved rail lines being built in states whose governors still see the wisdom of investing in such projects. But the Republican-led House took the $500 million previously spent on TIGER grants and gave it to Amtrak to fund intercity projects owned by either “Amtrak or States.” That reference to states, one lobbyist noted, opens the door to funneling more money to mostly rural states on Amtrak’s cross-country lines that serve few riders.

There is bipartisan support for infrastructure

Epstein 11

(Jennifer Epstein, “President Obama pushes infrastructure repair, blasts Congress”, 11/2/11, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1111/67458.html)

Quoting top congressional Republicans and former President Ronald Reagan, the president stressed that infrastructure repair and construction is a national prerogative, one that should have bipartisan support when a piece of his jobs bill comes up for a Senate vote later in the week. “If the speaker of the House, the Republican leader in the Senate, all the Democrats, all say that this is important to do, why aren’t we doing it? What’s holding us back? Let’s get moving and put America back to work,” Obama said in a morning speech on the banks of the Potomac River, the Key Bridge behind him crossing from the District of Columbia to Virginia.