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How About Omni-Bus Transportation?

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Why spend more money on intercity passenger rail when a transportation solution that connects travel modes, fills in gaps in the transportation system, and provides hassle-free mobility so inexpensively already exists today and is ready to go anywhere there's pavement?

The bus is already booming, as consumers are leaving overpriced rail service, and the frustrations of short-hop air travel. Clearly, travelers understand the bus is back, as ridership has soared to 762 million passenger trips annually. Independently owned and operated bus companies move more people than the domestic airlines in some years, and more people in two weeks than Amtrak does all year!

Buses can be routed to meet unexpected or emergency traveler demand at a moment's notice. Motorcoaches can go anywhere pavement exists – without additional federal operating funds being spent.

The question is not whether rail ("high speed" or otherwise) can be developed. The question is why the intercity bus industry is not further supported even in corridors where it makes economic, environmental and policy sense to do so. For instance several bus lines compete successfully in the market for customers traveling within the northeast corridor of the United States. They do so at a fraction of the price of an Amtrak ticket and with times that compare favorably with the rail carrier. So why is high speed rail necessary in this corridor – especially when each bus can potentially take 55 cars off of the road?

One projection has more than a billion dollars as necessary to get the track on the northeast corridor into condition to support high speed rail. That amount is in addition to the \$1.2 billion dollars Amtrak already receives from the federal government. Another study has the projected high speed rail corridor from Milwaukee to Minneapolis as needing untold millions in subsidies after it is completed for the foreseeable future. One can duplicate those scenarios in many places around the country. The cost of buying the right of way, laying the track, and subsidizing the passenger operations will be prohibitive.

As well, motorcoaches are the greenest way to travel. The Union of Concerned Scientists issued a report that concludes that whether you travel alone or with a family, if you are traveling between one hundred and one thousand miles, your best environmental choice is a motorcoach and it is not a close call.

This is not a plea to defund Amtrak or a plea for more money for buses. It is a plea for including the motorcoach industry in transportation planning. The industry needs MPOs, RPOs, States and the federal government to allow it to take part in the vital discussion of the nation's transportation future. All too often the industry, and what we accomplish daily on a

shoestring, is ignored in the rush to the expensive, and not altogether achievable, dream of high speed rail.

The question for decision is how can the States and federal government support high speed rail? The answer is that in many places they don't have to – and don't need to, until the corridor is more fully developed with buses. The transportation future can be less expensive, cheaper, certainly more efficient and cleaner than we will even get with high speed rail. It is called a bus.