

High-speed rail is a practical U.S. option

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Robert Samuelson presents a needlessly pessimistic outlook regarding the feasibility of high-speed rail service in the United States.

He totally misses the point — no one is going to propose a high-speed rail line from Wyoming to Iowa or other low-population areas. There are many city pairs that have the population density needed to create demand and which are separated by distances where convenient high-speed rail service will compete favorably with airline service — Boston and New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and St. Louis and Chicago are just a few that come quickly to mind.

By the way, the population density in New Jersey exceeds the figure that Mr. Samuelson quoted for Japan. He points out that the population densities in countries where high-speed rail has been introduced is much greater than here.

Rail service is less susceptible to weather delays and provides a generally more pleasant travel experience. No one needs to be at a train station two hours ahead of the scheduled departure time to be sure of clearing security, and I haven't seen bag-checking charges imposed by Amtrak.

Regarding the price of building the systems, for less than the cost of one year of our disastrous war in Iraq, we could connect 10 city pairs with high-speed rail service, using Mr. Samuelson's cost estimate. And we would have something positive to show for the money spent.

We need an administration with the foresight and political gumption to set a goal for the future in the same way that John F. Kennedy did in 1961. Let's have a truly modern rail service in place by the end of the decade.

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