

Freedom Matters

A Weekly Newsletter

Dane County, Wisconsin

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

The Next Big Sinkhole for Taxpayers to Fill

by Michael Byrne

Freedom Matters is watching the orchestration of a huge budget-busting public works project in Dane County that looms just over the horizon. It looks like a first class con job since the real data on it are being ignored, and critical numbers are being covered up. Have you guessed it?

It's commuter rail. Here is a diehard planner's dream, replete with all the ingredients of a great fantasy. It has job security, unexpected challenges requiring years to overcome, and ever more repressive projects to wrap a planner's mind around like converting single family zoning to high density zoning.

We say the whole thing is a tragic mistake.

Commuter rail in Madison is good for only two things: tapping the federal pork barrel and creating an excuse to compel the city to higher densities. All of the benefits claimed for rail are either fantasies or could be gained at a much lower cost by expanding bus service. Commuter rail is an obsolete technology and to build it in a low population city like Madison is a huge waste of taxpayers' money and of environmental resources.

To try to boost transit ridership, many cities have halted road expansions, hoping that increased congestion will make mass transit attractive. Of course, buses are caught in the same congestion as autos. This gives rail a contrived false advantage. In Portland, a proposed light-rail line was calculated to take 28 minutes to go from end to end. *Express buses already went the same distance in just 24 minutes.* But planners predicted that increased congestion (due to their failure to add road capacity to meet demand) would increase bus times to 40 minutes.

What transit agencies usually do *not* calculate is the time *lost* by auto users due to commuter rail. This can be significant where light rail lines frequently cross auto traffic. Even if every auto loses only a few seconds, the total can add up to far more than the savings to transit riders simply because there are so many more auto passengers than transit passengers. Losses will be especially large when existing lanes of roads that are open to autos are replaced by rail tracks. Taxis, buses, truck deliveries, ambulances, police, fire trucks, all suffer impacts.

Note: Dane County's own "Vision 2020", the infamous land use-transportation plan adopted by the county after being rejected by a majority of Dane County municipalities, proposes to deliberately increase traffic congestion so as to **force** people to give up commuting by car, van or bus. Some of the same politicians who promoted Vision 2020's strong arm plans to deliberately increase auto congestion are behind Transport 2020's plan to build commuter rail in Madison.

Here are issues and answers that railroaders can't rebut:

1. What **net** car traffic will the proposed commuter rail remove from city streets and roads at the planning horizon?

Answer: none.

The **data** in cities across the U.S.A. say that commuter rail, given the increased population density planned for it, will result in a net **increase** in car traffic, not a decrease. One thing is sure. Most people will not use rail. It limits their options. *Imagine the typical errand running householder trying to arrange their already busy modern life around a train, the fixed guideway remnant of an obsolete lifestyle.*

You can lead the iron horse to people, but you can't make them ride it. Rail proponents need to do **human engineering**, not railroad engineering. The only reason they can favor commuter rail at all is because they fail to favor people.

2. Will the urban chemical pollutants (volatile organics, nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide, etc.) at the planning horizon be more or less with commuter rail than without it?

Answer: more pollution with rail.

The issue is not if future pollution will be less. It will be, because of cleaner cars. The issue is whether commuter rail, by blocking car and truck traffic, will cause more pollution than that from increased car traffic without commuter rail. Since so few people ride trains, commuter rail likely will **cause the greater** air pollution.

3. Efficiency per rider: what is the cost per new trip via rail (as projected by the Federal Transit Administration Cost Effectiveness Index)? Hence, what is the annual cost per new commuter?

Answer: Exorbitantly high.

The Transport 2020 study group knows this number, but it is so scary, they are hiding it. The cost per new trip via rail in Madison is three times that of big cities, and 30 times that for an expanded bus system. It is greater than leasing a luxury car for each new rail rider.

5. What is the economic growth impact of the commuter rail?

Answer: No new growth; redistribution of jobs favoring City of Madison.

The Dane County Board approved \$2 million "for more planning" of this boondoggle. Let's make them do a more open-minded addressing of the data and alternatives. (Continued in the next issue.)

Readers' Bulletin Board. e-mail us your comments. Include your name, for publication by *Freedom Matters*

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