

Freedom Matters

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Dane County, Wisconsin

Preserving Property Rights

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Our republic limits government to securing individual unalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. These rights are eroded by legislatures, and by courts complicit with them. To encourage wise jurists and journalists to help, *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore that republic.

Economics and Politics of Cars vs Trains

by Bob Bowman

The economics of trains is not rocket science, unless one is a hopeless choo-choo addict. The basic data are simple. In Madison, Wisconsin, if <30% of city commutes will be by mass-transit train, then train is **not** as efficient, **nor** as environmentally friendly, as mass transit bus. But, with streets, cars and buses available, no more than 1-2% of city commutes will be by mass-transit train. That's what the totality of data emphatically say.

However, the economics, and therefore the environmental soundness, of mass-transit rail is not even as favorable as the above unfavorable 1-2% figure indicates. People live in buildings – a forest of buildings. Fire trucks and ambulances have to be able to reach those buildings, and for that, we **absolutely need** our roads and streets, even if we had no automobiles at all.

Of course, the same streets used by such service vehicles can also convey the daily commutes of the people. So of course we use streets to commute, but not often by foot. We prefer to move by motor, and nothing so moves us as the availability of that personal self-propelled device, the automobile or car. Convenience is the handmaiden of efficiency, whereby, for most of our short-haul commutes, nothing beats the car. *Hence, nothing will get us out of our cars except a catastrophic social or infrastructure breakdown. Nothing.*

Yet, how easily that rock-solid economics of our social order gets forgotten, or condemned, in the fire of certain political minds. The officially adopted political blueprint for Dane County, namely *Vision 2020*, blatantly proposes a transportation policy of **deliberately making Madison streets congested**. That policy is meant to force people out of their cars and into mass transit, as stated in public drafts, but edited out of the final draft.

The politicians who were so stupid as to believe in the above policy could afford to be that blatant about it because they knew that hardly anyone bothers to read political documents, or understands them if they do. Even today, it is unlikely that even 1% of county citizens have read *Vision 2020* and therefore know this officially adopted policy. That's why *Vision 2020* was adopted by the duly elected Dane County Board, the legal representatives of the 400,000 or so citizens who have not read *Vision 2020* and who vote in blissful ignorance of it.

Who are these politicians who work to force us out of our cars and into environmentally-unfriendly mass transit trains? Think Progressive Dane and their fellow travelers on the county board and the city council. Think about their most prominent fellow traveler in this folly, County Executive Kathleen Falk.

Remember, the issue is not train versus cars; it is mass-transit train versus mass-transit bus. There is a segment of the population unable to go by car who need another option, and on the whole, mass-transit bus is far and away the rational choice as that option. To the contrary, mass-transit train in Madison is economically irrational, to the point of stupidity and absurdity.

People in Madison and Dane County generally know this. About three years ago, the county hired Chamberlain Associates to do a comprehensive planning survey of 500 county residents selected quasi-randomly. Those respondents reported their three highest priorities as: **good jobs, good roads and good water**. Mass-transit train was mired in the murk of the least frequent responses on that survey. It wasn't even on the radar.

So why hasn't this sensible mainstream view percolated through to quash the obstinate elitist push for mass-transit rail in Madison? One reason is the poverty of the local press. It can't afford very much investigative reporting, so it often merely parrots the handouts of official governmental committees. It hasn't tracked and reported which elected officials are guilty of pursuing unconscionably huge public expenditures for such a fiscally irresponsible monstrosity as a commuter train that will cost in excess of \$60 dollars per passenger ride.

Recently, elected officials favoring mass-transit rail have asked for legal authority to impose a sales tax on county residents outside of Madison in order to pay for commuter rail in Madison, via a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). That does it. It's past time for rational forces to rise up and put a halt to this nonsense.

The same press that exposed the infamous caucus scandal in the state legislature, and that is hammering at prosecutorial abuse in the Dane County district attorney's office, should finally set their sights on exposing the unseemly drive to build an exorbitantly expensive and ineffective mass-transit rail in Madison. There are people who need to be knocked out of elected office over this folly, in order to restore sanity to the county issues of transportation and development.

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

*** Published by Freedom Matters, Inc., Cross Plains, WI. 53528, Elena Byrne, Editor ***
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