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We at Rails are delighted to see passenger rail finally making it into public discussion in New Mexico, and believe we have done our part in making this happen. However, we need to clear up some confusion regarding various types of passenger trains.

Rail Trolleys
or trolley cars are just that – individual railcars about the size of a bus. They stop at almost every street corner and operate within a downtown and to nearby attractions. Trolley cars can be old, replica, restored or brand new.

Light Rail Vehicles
are somewhat heavier trolleys that can be coupled together in “trainsets”. These operate within a city or between a city and its outlying areas. Stops are further apart and speeds are greater than with trolley cars.

Commuter/Heavy Rail
consists of “real” trains – comfortable, often bi-level cars either sol-powered or pulled by a locomotive. These cars are equipped with large upholstered seats, restrooms, trays or tables, even snack bars and computer plug-ins. Commuter/heavy rail trains run between major populations centers with stops along the way and usually use existing rights-of-way (tracks).

Superliner Service
is the next step up. These are the cross-country and long-haul trains such as those that Amtrak runs. They include sleeping cars, dining cars and lounge-observation cars.

High-speed Rail
usually refers to the fast (100-125 mph) trains widely in service in Europe and along our coasts. These require high-class track and special control and signalling systems.

Bullet Trains
are even faster – up to 150-200 mph – and require dedicated track, not shared with any other trains.

Magnetic Levitation (maglev) Trains
are not exactly trains as we understand them. They are sleek train-like vehicles suspended in a magnetic field within a special guideway system. Maglevs are smooth, safe, faster than many aircraft and very costly – not much less than a modern highway.

All these systems, except maglev, operate on regular gauge railroad track. Track weight and strength vary depending on the kind of service it is supporting. Generally speaking, we recommend heavy enough track to support several kinds of conveyances. For example, it might be worthwhile to be able to operate both light rail and rail trolley cars in the same service area.

Motive power is best furnished by plain old diesel, modern diesel motor units (DMUs), and/or overhead electric lines. Modern overhead rail power lines are quite unobtrusive and are easily energized either by regular or renewably generated (wind, solar, . . .) electricity.

Light rail and commuter trains are controllable at both ends (some appear to run backwards in one direction). This eliminates the need for space-consuming turn-around loops.

The above train definitions are only approximate, and varioius hybrids and combinations exist. Of the seven kinds of rail systems presented here, we consider the high speed rail, bullet train, and maglev options just wonderful – *someday*. For the near term, we urge that work begin immediately on the first four; implementation to proceed in the following manner:

1. Build the 10-15 miles of modern track and signalling needed for efficient commuter rail service into downtown Santa Fe, using existing remnant right-of-way wherever possible.
2. Begin commuter rail service between Belen and Bernalillo, early AM to late PM, 365 days per year, using a minimum of two trainsets, probably crossing each other at the Alvarado Station in Albuquerque.
3. Expand this service to Santa Fe (and Socorro) as infrastructure permits.
4. Get light rail (and express bus) underway in the Albuquerque area, as well as rail trolley service along the "String of Pearls" corridor as proposed in the Albuquerque Rapid Transit Project.
5. Have the state strongly pursue the restoration of Amtrak or similar superliner service between El Paso and Denver.
6. Get the public on board through a media compaign and possibly live enevts in which real trains are brought in for weekend demonstration runs with music, refreshments, briefings of proposed service and free rides to the public.
7. Organize special trains to popular events – balloon fiesta, concerts, etc.

REMEMBER:

- Anti-rail forces sometimes use bullet, high-speed, and maglev trains to illustrate how expensive passsenger rail is. The more modest rail services described above are, relatively speaking, cheap, quick to install and easy to organize with minimum noise and disruption along the route – even during construction.
- Buses – big, small, private and public – are essential to a good transportation system, but they are NOT ENOUGH. Passenger rail is closely compatible with all other modes, even cars and trucks.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Get involved. Let our politcal leaders, your family, friends, co-workers know that you support full choice transportation anchored by passenger rail. Call. Write. E-mail. There are some forward-looking state and local officials in New Mexico, but they

need to know the public is backing their efforts.

Contact us for more information.

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