BULLETIN June 2004

Q. What do the following have in common?

- Air quality
- Efficient land use (vs. sprawl)
- Personal health and safety
- Pulic health and safety
- Historic preservation
- Garbage/recycling issues
- Traffic congestion
- Renewable energy production
- Increased employment/poverty reduction
- Disposable income
- National security
- Smart growth
- Deficit reduction (federal, state, local, personal)
- Use (and availability) of leisure time
- Business and worker productivity
- Global warming
- Stress

A. Passenger rail generates a positive impact on this whole grab-bag of issues and a few we have probably overlooked.

Local and regional passenger rail is making a comeback in the US. Government, community and business leaders from all over the political map have begun to realize what we note above: rail solves a lot of problems.

Even New Mexico is beginning to see the light. Commuter (regional) and light rail are no longer presented exclusively in terms of science fiction or nostalgia. The governor, the mayor or Albuquerque, and others have spoken out in favor of passenger rail. The legislature has made some progress toward the existence of

regional transit authorities, and the Mid Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) is trying to put together an RTA.

Things are looking hopeful and we at Rails are feeling encouraged. There are, however, several points we wish to emphasize:

1. We must have real RTA’s; that is, entities that span more than one county or metro area.
2. We need to get past local rivalries, turf wars and inter-jurisdiction resentments. Without true regionalism, public transportation will likely become a logistic nightmare and a public laughing stock.
3. An RTA must have full power to raise capital and operating funds – funds from stable and permanent sources. An RTA must also be able to keep and use what it earns, such as from fares; no shifting of proceeds over to some other fund or account. In other words, alarming as this may sound to some, an RTA should possess the powers of, and be subject to the oversightof, a government – a transportation “government” representative of everybody within its area of operation.
4. Bus and express bus services are important, but not enough! Along the principal corridors of New Mexico, communter rail must be considered an “anchor” mode, much like a major air route. Other modes, especially light rail, should feed these or go where they can’t. We suggest a close study of the transit systems of the Calgary, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, St. Louis and Salt Lake City regions.
5. These services must be regular, frequent and comfortable. There should be no skimping with regard to number of vehicles, quality of vehicles or stationary facilities. Any extra startup money invested in modern trains, buses, station shelters and parking facilities will not be lost forever – it will come back as greater fare box revenue, public enthusiasm and mitigation of our many auto-related problems.
6. Fares must be affordable to everyone. No transportation system “makes” money. Intermodal transportation is a public service with public benefits and should be thought of as such. Having said that, remember that public rail

systems actually do pretty well at the fare box compared to buses and other modes.

We'd like to present three more facts:

1. Public transportation, anchored by rail, is the future.
2. Cost and taxation are meaningless concepts except in the context of investment and return ("What do I get for my money"?).
3. Driving in New Mexico's populous areas is not really all that bad – yet.

Which means that our job in transportation reform is to win the public over to safer, more convenient, economically wiser alternatives to what we endure now, not to try to force or guilt-trip them into choosing among ordeals.

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