

(Somewhat Less Orthodox Rail Technologies)

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We at Rails Inc. have pretty much stuck to “ordinary” trains in our educational and advocacy efforts toward passenger Rail for New Mexico; reliable off-the-shelf rolling stock, existing rights-of-way, 80 mph or less, and so forth. There’s nothing wrong with this. The biggest part of our mission has been to place passenger Rail into the consciousness of New Mexico somewhere between nostalgia and science fiction. This seems to be working: Commuter Rail is here and they’re running it right.

Rail transit for Albuquerque, however, is a different story. Unfortunately for rail advocates, for the public and for common sense, Albuquerque is still stuck in a transportation debate not unlike that concerning whether the Earth is flat or not.

Nonetheless, let’s range ahead a little and talk about other kinds of Rail possibilities for New Mexico.

TAKING THE CURVES

There are at least 2 companies making trainsets especially designed to take curves faster than “regular” trains do. One, ABB Daimler-Benz, employs electronic sensing and computer guidance to achieve the required balance. The other, Patentes Talgo SA, gets its results through the mechanical design of the cars. These systems can raise by 15-30% the speed with which a passenger train can safely negotiate those scenic curves so beloved by us and by railroad photographers. Being a keep-it-simple kind of outfit, we lean toward the Talgos, but we’re open-minded non-experts and would like to see serious attention paid to this issue. After all, there’s a lot of curved track in New Mexico and it might be pretty expensive and disruptive to try to straighten out all we may someday need for future passenger service.

Consult: www.talgoamerica.com

CHEAP LIGHT RAIL?

Please consult **Major Studies** on this Web site for information about LR-55. This is a promising Light Rail construction scheme being employed in England and Ireland, and possibly being considered for our own East Coast. LR-55 deserves attention primarily due to its minimal disruption of streets and utilities. They use pre-stressed concrete lintels with track grooves already cast in, which they install in shallow trenches dug in the street. This allows for very speedy night installation (up to 200 yards per night, they tell us), and much shallower street excavation. This translates to much less disruption of traffic and underground utilities, a shorter construction period and considerable cost savings.

Consult: Professor Lesley at: ljslesley@aol.com.

AND WHAT ABOUT MAG-LEV?

A lot of transportation visionaries look to magnetic levitation as a model for the future of Rail and mass transportation in general. Mag-lev trains currently operate in Germany and Japan, are being planned elsewhere in Europe, and are fast and smooth. Over 300 mph is not uncommon. They sound wonderful, but we at Rails Inc. have tried to discourage discussion of Mag-Lev for New Mexico on walk-before-you-run grounds. Besides, Mag-Lev is expensive compared to “regular” train systems—almost up there with highway construction. Having said all that—

We have recently become aware of a prototype system currently being developed and tested by General Atomics in conjunction with the Lawrence Livermore Labs. This type of Mag-Lev propulsion relies heavily on advanced-alloy permanent magnets, which of course use no power once built and installed. This technology offers the promise of cheaper construction and greater energy economy than does regular Mag-Lev, which is all-electromagnetic in design. For more Urban Mag-Lev information,

Consult: Don Oppenheimer at oppyds@prodigy.net.

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