

A Tale of Two Conventions:

From about June 15 to June 19 of this year, your JW attended the national conventions of the Railroad Workers United (**RWU**) and a remarkable rising labor movement, called **Labor Notes**.

RWU: Visiting the Web site <https://www.railroadworkersunited.org> , along with studying the *Highball* Newsletters we send along to our-e readers, would be time well spent. The RWU is trying to build a single powerful labor voice out of the dozen or more scattered Rail workers' unions around the USA and Canada, groups not as unified in voice and tactics as you might guess.

And since, as we hold, the future and welfare of our country is closely tied to the health and vitality of our modern trains (freight as well as passenger), all this is very important and well becoming better acquainted with— —and joining. Since JW doesn't work for a railroad, he is a "Solidarity Member" of the RWU.

We suggest you follow his example by studying the above-mentioned materials and joining up. They are an independent tax-exempt non-profit, democratically organized.

Labor Notes: People, you had to see this to believe it. The Labor Notes convention boasted around 4000 attendees, comprising a dazzling array of mostly young people of every color and gender preference you could imagine. This exuberant high-energy multitude is hell-bent on organizing, and fighting on behalf of, the millions of North American workers, not protected, or poorly protected, by a union. Remember, unions are an essential counterweight to Big Business. Checks and Balances, people.

<https://www.labornotes.org> .

The possible upcoming RR Strike

By the time you read this piece, it might be obsolete.

The Media should have covered this a lot sooner; not that they would have done a fully informative job.

To keep up, go to <https://railroadworkersunited.org> . The RWU is a non- partisan non-profit "caucus" across all the many and sometimes fractious Rail unions.

Please put up with whatever inconvenience this action may cause you. **They don't strike for nothing.**

Forwarded by advocate Lora Lucero of Albuquerque:

"CSX, the port and some industry representatives have argued passenger service is a threat to the economies of Alabama and Mississippi. But Amtrak and rail advocates say those concerns are overblown and point to Amtrak's legal right to use the tracks." .
https://www.nola.com/news/article_f356b37c-03ac-11ed-a91e-031993a3e0f0.html#uid=323dbdffdc3661b635b62987258bc0ee

I hope people will write to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) and signal their support for Amtrak's application this month.

Martin J. Oberman, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW / Washington, DC. 20423

The Bigger Question

Our recent articles and those in the Rail Users Network (RUN) and the RWU *Newsletters* (hope you all still have them), taken as a whole, point, in our opinion and that of a slowly increasing number of other advocates, to one underlying critical question:

"Can Amtrak ever become the national passenger Rail carrier it should be as the neither Private nor Public entity it is now? On private trackage?"

Another reminder: That all those long-and-mid-distance tracks criss-crossing America **are not** a Rail equivalent of the Interstate Highway System; that is, **publicly owned**. No Sir. No Ma'am. With the exception of the Boston / Washington DC corridor and a few short segments elsewhere, these tracks are in the hands of a few giant freight-rail corporations, who operate on them for the benefit of their own leaders and their shareholders and investors.

These groups are not oriented towards a nimble, public-friendly, business-friendly national transportation service, efficiently hauling what the country makes and needs from one place to another, for a **nice return on investment**. They're after as **huge a return as quickly as possible**, and damn the long-term consequences for the country, and even for solid Conservative businesses. And they've never been crazy about passenger trains on THEIR tracks.

The solution? The tracks should be OUR tracks, not THEIR tracks. They can still make money operating under basic public-good guidelines and paying their share of taxes to run around on the network. Just like our cars, trucks, planes, and barges!

How American can you get?

JUST A REMINDER — — that this Subsidy red herring just won't die. This piece appeared in December 2012:



THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE

INSIGHT & OPINION

Hidden 'subsidies'

Opponents of passenger rail say it doesn't pay for itself. Well, neither does automotive transport or the airlines, but we seldom use the S-word with those industries

By J.W. Madison

There are several major arguments against passenger rail and rail transit, arguments that continue to be heard all over New Mexico even though they're wrong.

That's because several are at least plausible.

One is pernicious. I call it the Subsidy Gambit. This little masterpiece of brainwashing just won't go away, despite abundant evidence to the contrary. Its proponents whisper, whine or shout that passenger rail is "subsidized by the government" — that it "doesn't pay for itself."

As a scare-tactic epithet, *subsidy* is the liberal or commie of transportation debates. It's also a big, stinking red herring.

Subsidy — that is, public support — is the very food of transportation. But while passenger rail has to fight every year for scraps, our auto and air modes are stuffed so full they can barely move (literally).

Consider automobile subsidies:

- The costs of our roads, highways, signage, etc., are not nearly covered by drivers through road tolls and fuel taxes. They're paid by everybody, driver or not.

- Same with the police, the courts, emergency personnel, ambulances and hospitals, about 25 percent of whose work is devoted to auto-related casualties and property damage.

- Same again with the health and economic costs of air pollution, continuous road maintenance, road closings and traffic jams.

We all shell out for these through lost wages, lower productivity, higher taxes, higher medical bills and in the cost of everything we buy that was made somewhere else — which, unfortunately, is almost everything we buy.

- Our roads and highways are built on land that's been "condemned"; that is, removed from the tax base, as opposed to the land under railroad bridges and rights-of-way, which is taxed.

TODAY'S BYLINE

Madison is president of Rails Inc., a New Mexico nonprofit group (nmrails.org) dedicated to restoring or improving passenger rail service to Albuquerque and local rail transit.

- There is an extensive and not widely understood subsidy structure underlying "free" parking and the accommodation of cars and their shelters in our residential and commercial buildings and on their lots.

These costs are built into what we pay for houses, streets and consumer goods, whether you own one motor vehicle, several or none.

Then there are the air subsidies:

- Airports, control towers and associated structures are built and operated by tax-funded government entities, such as the Federal Aviation Administration.

- Pilots, mechanics and some other workers are trained in large part by the military, saving the airlines a bundle.

- Air traffic controllers and their support workers are civil servants, paid by all of us and at a lower rate of pay than they would earn as key corporate employees. They get "below market wages."

- As with highways, the often prime real estate under our many vast airports has also been removed from the tax base.

- The results of government-funded research, prototyping, testing and maintenance plans for military aircraft provide a free jump start for the manufacturers and caretakers of civilian aircraft, parts and maintenance equipment, as many civilian aircraft are adaptations of military aircraft.

- Airlines enjoy some exemptions from federal antitrust laws, especially concerning the setting of fares.

These road and air subsidies are by no means all bad. I, for one, think our air traffic controllers and emergency responders

should be public servants.

And almost no one thinks we should plow up our rural and farm-to-market roads just because they're not "profitable" through user fees. The problem is one of unfairness and favoritism.

The lopsided nature of our taxpayer-funded transportation support has led to the mess we're making of our cities, suburbs and landscape — rampant (and subsidized) sprawl, gridlock, death, injury, personal and public insolvency, preventable disease, a dirty environment, even war and global warming.

A rail-anchored transportation system provides huge savings in fuel/energy consumption; very little death or injury; greater take-home pay, less "stress"; greater worker and business productivity; more open space preservation; and more "livable" communities. Trust me, this list goes on and on.

Rail is also the perfect complement to both renewable energy and the use of non-motorized transportation — biking and walking advocates take note.

Plus, people just like trains. All over the all-American, car-loving West, local and regional rail face opposition campaigns worthy of Karl Rove — opposition that shrinks dramatically about one minute after the trains start running. Just ask around those liberal hotbeds, like Dallas, Salt Lake City and Calgary, Alberta.

A dollar's worth of government (read public) support for well-run transit has been shown to return at least four dollars in benefits to the public. With rail-anchored transit, this return is much higher. Sounds more like a shrewd investment of the taxpayers' money than a "subsidy," doesn't it?

Rail transportation in all its many forms is the wave of the future. If New Mexico is going to buck this wholesome trend or just keep stalling, let's at least clear the air as to just who's getting what handouts from where.