

TO: Denver Post – Letters to the Editor:

Denver Post writers David Harsanyi and Chuck Plunkett appear to suffer from inaccurate information, unsubstantiated pessimism or a misunderstanding of what Fas Tracks can do, not just for Denver but for the entire metroregion. Time and space prevent me from examining in detail each of their points in the Denver Post Oct. 18 Perspective “Can Fas Tracks be Saved?” Let me present some different data on just three items in the Post story: 1. more lanes vs good train service, 2. “glaring redundancies” and 3. air pollution costs comparing bus, car and rail.

1. Additional concrete roadways spawn suburban development, promote low-quality auto dependent growth at each interchange and contribute more air pollution to Denver’s increasing number of air quality violations. Compact, quality mixed use development at commuter rail stations gives options to people who do not wish to be, or cannot afford to be, auto dependent. Denver is at least twenty years behind progressive cities around the world that have connected their major airport and satellite cities with highspeed heavy rail. And travelers with luggage manage very well in rail-connected airports in Washington, DC, New York City, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco plus dozens of others in Europe, Asia and Australia., Trains run in all weather unlike accident or snow clogged “expressways.”

2. Journalists who see “glaring redundancies” with bus and rail lines serving somewhat nearby markets are apparently blinded by the fact that the excellent regional RTD fleet serves load centers that are very different from the city center rail stations. These transit villages have, or will evolve, as high value transit-oriented developments as can be seen in Toronto Canada, Perth Australia, Stockholm Sweden and along the heavily auto congested megalopolis stretches from Boston to Washington. It is fortunate that London Heathrow and Gatwick airports have built not redundant but extra capacity rail and bus service to handle growth. Denver is projected to triple in population this century within a 971 square mile DRCOG urban service boundary. Political savvy planners should attempt to accommodate the growth of population, not auto traffic, in compact transit-oriented developments connected by efficient all-weather rail service. Readers should be reminded that inner city light rail with frequent stops, crash limitations and a moving speed of 35 mph should not be confused with 79 mph commuter rail that will bring passengers (and shoppers) into Denver Union Station (a transit oriented development - TOD) almost twice as fast as single occupancy vehicles (SOV) when the roadways will be clogged by 2020, if the CDOT and DRCOG projections are reliable. It has been proven in most urban areas that train ridership increases more than 40 percent over projections after the second year of service.

3. Driving a SOV in the Denver region has known annual dollar costs of \$6000-\$8000 per year that include insurances, parking fees, traffic fines, depreciation, maintenance (oil, lub, tires) plus the almost daily terrible costs of auto fatalities and fender bender damage. Now add in the external costs to the environment and to human health via road noise, air pollution and stress from bumper to bumper traffic jams.

What many Denver residents may not realize is that if our airshed exceeds federal air quality standards for nitrous oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), particulates, ozone etc. as spelled out in the Clean Air Act, we risk losing 90 percent of the federal government dollars match for highway construction and waste water treatment plant improvements. Those are very large chunks of money that are hard to come by even in good economic times and with very clean air.

In order to compare air quality impacts of trains versus buses versus automobiles here are data published by the RTD and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) as we looked at the Northwest Corridor Fas Tracks multi-year environmental impact draft. In order to carry 300-400 passengers on a 50-mile round trip, this is a list of the relative level of pollutants (combined PM₁₀, NO_x, hydrocarbons (HC) and CO in grams per round trip for the modes listed below:

10 buses = 15,000 grams/round trip combined (RTC)

3 locomotives hauled bi-level coaches + locomotive = 7,800 grams/RTC

4 single level diesel motor unit (train) = 7,400 grams/RTC

300 automobiles = 228,000 grams/RTC

Fas Tracks should be saved and accelerated in order for Denver to compete in the international market of quality living. Quality of life is partly defined by giving citizens of the region a choice of transportation options. Commuter rail provides an efficient, all weather form of intercity transportation. The more delays, the more costly the regional passenger rail service will become and our air pollution, congestion and parking problems will also exasperate. Let us hope the Denver Post will provide a more accurate and balanced picture of heavy rail service than we have read in the past by checking out experts and city examples where rail service is fast and on track.

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