

"Baby You Can Drive My Car": Ditching the Automobile in Favor of High-Speed Rail

Our national dependence on infrastructure that supports combustion-based vehicles has reached a critical mass. No longer the symbol of technological achievement and accessibility, the American Highway has become a sign of inefficiency that has rendered our national landscape a sea of brake lights. Chronic traffic congestion, degraded air, water, and soil quality, and suburban sprawl are symptomatic of an aging transportation system unable to cope with current demand. Recent projections suggest populations will rapidly increase in cities nationwide, placing greater strain on an already broken highway system. Inadequate and unreliable transportation further worsen pre-existing issues, especially for those already marginalized by food disparities, with limited access to adequate health care, and/or forced to live in degraded environmental conditions due to income inequality. Adding an extra HOV lane is a weak gesture that only further reinforces an antiquated anthropogenic national ideology while the environment and marginalized suffer most as consequence.

The current transportation system was built upon arbitrary political and social lines ignoring geographic and ecological boundaries with a watershed, thus further weakening people's perception of their relationship with the land. Detachment from our ecological communities, amplified by an increasingly consumer-driven society, has led people to become dependent on mega-conglomerations who subsidize traveling costs of goods from far away all while using myths like the "family farm" as convenient propaganda to tidy up their image. The people, marginalized and nearly fully dependent on corporations for sustenance, are the David against Goliath capitalist interests. I propose that development of an energy-efficient High-Speed Rail (HSR) Network must become the environmental movement's unified focus to reconnect people with their environment. It is essential the HSR planning committee carefully consider each watershed's temporal and spatial limitations, accessibility to those living in food deprived zones, and how to engage stakeholders in developing sustainable practices before, during, and after construction. We must modernize our infrastructure, and the HSR provides a viable way to reduce overall environmental impacts, prepare for rapidly shifting populations, and provide a convenient way for people to connect with their local environment. It is hard to care about the environment when you feel disenfranchised. When people care about where they live, they tend to want those spaces healthy and vibrant.