IMONIERS

High-Speed Rail

Festival on Sunday promises an of White River Junction's rail system will become the rallying cry. Who wouldn't like to hop on a and travel more quickly, reliably and affordably? New York or Montreal? Dream on, right? Well, the Vermont Department of Transportation has rail routes throughout the area, ashing right through White River Junction or straight to Burlington or 511 billion has been given for high-speed rail projects in early enough money to build the rail systems common in France. It will be the current development site. White River Junction has been too long. Instead, it has been to try again in the perhaps hope that more funds will continue to be available.

How to Bring Back Passenger Railroads

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For The Valley News

The Obama Administration is treating high-speed passenger rail service, seeing it as a job stimulus and an environmentally sound alternative to the automobile. Various state and regional groups are competing for federal grants. Some winners, dividing $8 billion, were chosen earlier this year; others are encouraged to try again in the perhaps hope that more funds will continue to be available.

High-speed rail, while exciting and perhaps necessary in some corridors, isn't all that country needs. Underlying the administration's grant competition is an important public policy debate pitting high-speed rail enthusiasts against those who argue that the nation also needs to reinvigorate, build, and reliable passenger-rail services that do not operate on dedicated high-speed corridors.

Unfortunately, the advocates for this kind of reliable passenger service are second-class citizens, like White River Junction/New York and even White River Junction/Boston via Concord appear to be losing the debate to the dedicated-track high-speeders. That's not surprising. Federal dollars aren't going to fund a bullet train that stops in White River Junction.

The loss of passenger services goes back to the 1970s, when current rail policy was formulated. At that time, the nation's railroads had an obligation, enforced by the Interstate Commerce Commission, to provide adequate passenger service. That obligation could be relieved only on a case-by-case, train-by-train basis if the car could show that continuing the particular passenger train was no longer consistent with "public convenience and necessity." The arguments before the Interstate Commerce Commission were essentially the latter. Increasingly, there were good alternatives to the passenger train, and passengers were deserting rail service for those alternatives, resulting in decreasing losses for the train service in question. Those losses, in turn, led to a diminution in service, initiating a vicious cycle. The losses also jeopardized the carrier's ability to provide adequate freight service needed by the public. Those losses jeopardized the very solvency of the private-sector U.S. rail system. A powerful undercurrent during a time of rolling bankruptcies (almost a third of the U.S. rail mileage was operated by trustees in bankruptcy). The outcome of cases before the Interstate Commerce Commission was predictable. The carriers usually prevailed, and the U.S. passenger rail system broke up like chips falling off a table.

Congress finally realized that it could no longer postpone acting to save the relics of rail passenger service for the economic needs of railroads. The issue became one of the protection of private-sector U.S. railroads from bankruptcy — and the protection of Congress from the bad neighborhood.