



## Opinion

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## All Aboard

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By [ANTHONY P. DEDOUSIS](#)

Two Fridays ago, I was at Logan Airport, waiting to catch a flight to New York for a job interview. When I asked the company's human-resources representative if I should take the Acela train to New York, she laughed, told me I would never get to the office in time for the interview, and booked me a ticket on the Delta shuttle. I saw her point—the "high-speed" Acela can only travel an average of 85 miles per hour. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a close friend of mine from high school was landing at Shanghai Pudong Airport for his semester abroad. He bought a ticket for the brand-new Maglev train from Pudong to the center of the city, covering a distance of twenty miles in seven minutes.

This tale of two trips showcases America's need for high-speed train transportation. Japan, France, Germany, and Spain have had extensive high-speed rail systems for decades, recognizing that they provide a convenient, efficient, and environmentally friendly form of transportation. It is time that we follow their lead.

High-speed trains, true to their name, are fast. They travel over 150 miles per hour, which is about three times faster than a car on a highway. When you factor in traffic, travel by car is even slower in comparison. They are also faster than air travel for distances of less than 500 miles—though airplanes can reach higher speeds, flight check-in, interminable security lines, and inevitable delays make train travel a speedier option.

High-speed trains also drop passengers off at downtown stations, while airports are usually built on the outskirts of cities. Train travel thus eliminates the need for a cab ride into the city, saving time and reducing traffic. It took me about three hours to go from Harvard Square to Midtown Manhattan; a bullet train would have cut my travel time in half.

Greater concern for the environment and climate has created a need for greener transportation that has so far gone unfilled. High-speed rail fits the bill; according to Popular Mechanics, high-speed trains emit, on average, 40 percent less carbon per passenger-mile compared to cars and 55 percent less carbon compared to jets. The popularity of trains in Japan and Europe has taken millions of cars off the roads. The result is less congestion and less air pollution.

President Obama has recognized the role transportation projects can play in revitalizing the economy. His recent stimulus package wisely includes \$8 billion for the construction

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and repair of rail infrastructure. High-speed rail projects create an immediate economic benefit as well as a long-term one. Initially, the construction of new rail lines and the ancillary demand for steel and concrete will create thousands of jobs.

Once operational, the trains will facilitate long-distance commuting, putting urban jobs in reach of exurban and small-town workers. Faster travel will encourage companies to relocate further outside of major cities, where real estate is cheaper and tax incentives are more forthcoming. This would be especially useful for revitalizing regions that are hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs, like the Upper Midwest and upstate New York. Funding for rail projects should be considered an investment in America's long-term economic robustness.

Of course, even if high-speed rail were to become a popular mode of transportation in the United States, there would still be significant demand for car and airplane travel. Nevertheless, high-speed trains would relieve airport and highway congestion by providing a competitive alternative mode of transportation. Fewer cars on the road means less traffic for those who choose to drive. Airlines will offer far fewer short-haul flights, which reduces the number of delays and frees up runway space for the long-distance flights that train travel cannot compete with. Best of all, a shift toward rail travel eliminates some of the massive and costly expansion of highways and airports that will be needed in the not-so-distant future if current trends in transportation continue.

Over the coming years, America will expand and replace its aging transportation infrastructure. Including high-speed trains in this equation will shorten travel time and be a boon to long-term economic growth and the environment. If we are wise enough to embrace high-speed rail, foreign tourists will one day travel through this country and feel the same sense of wonderment that my friend did on his first day in Shanghai.

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*Anthony P. Dedousis '11, a Crimson editorial writer, is an economics concentrator in Leverett House.*

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