



Letter to the Editor  
*The Economist*

Two points in your recent article "Still aloft, just: Maglev trains lose some of their magic" [Sept. 28th, 2006] warrant comment. Despite the gravity of the 09.22 accident, the Transrapid train did not derail, there was no explosion or fire from the collision, and several passengers were able to evacuate. The technology did not fail – it appears that humans failed. Our belief in the fundamental safety of the technology has not been shaken.

You also stated that maglev is expensive, and must rely on public support. Today *all* transportation projects are expensive. However, the bulk of the costs are in the civil construction. On a cost-per-mile basis, maglev is comparable to all projects, including highway construction which has no technology cost associated. This does not include costs of remediating the environmental effects of cars and trucks on air, water and land consumption.

New transportation technologies often need an initial public boost. Once built, however, high-speed intercity maglev can be self-sufficient. High speed and frequent, reliable service allow for ticket prices that can cover the costs of operations and maintenance and pay the debt service on revenue bonds.

The future for maglev is bright: The Central Japan Railway Company just announced that US\$3.1 billion will be invested in its Yamanashi Maglev Test Line, and to improve their system for future commercialization.

In the U.S., more, not fewer, maglev projects are taking hold. In addition to the several projects listed in your article, in the Southeastern U.S., an expansive environmental effort is just beginning to examine using high-speed ground transportation and maglev to link Atlanta, Georgia, to Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The time has come for new solutions to old problems. Maglev is a new solution.

Sincerely,

L. Joe Ferguson  
Chairman  
U.S. Maglev Coalition