

European trains for U.S. travelers?

Rising gasoline prices here in the U.S. cause most of us to pay close attention to the price at the pump. Gone are the days when we jumped in the car to do an errand without giving the cost of fuel a thought. What can be done? You've got to get to work and back and make at least a weekly trip to the store. Perhaps it's time we think outside the box for a better transportation solution. One answer might be to take a page from the European train plan.

Transportation infrastructure here in the U.S. consists mainly of highways. If you don't own a car, getting around can be a big inconvenience. True, here in the U.S., we have a rail system, but it is concentrated mainly on the East Coast, serving the large business centers. If our rail system was expanded to rival the European train system, people living in Santa Barbara could easily commute to San Francisco or Los Angeles.

After World War II, our government invested heavily in the freeways, with interstates criss-crossing the country. Gigantic tangles of freeway stretches were incorporated to navigate across large metropolitan areas. At that time, everyone was into the freedom of having their own car to carry them anywhere they pleased. The luxury and convenience of travel by automobile was welcomed by all. Gas costs were not then a monstrous portion of a family's income.

Today, it can be argued that we should invest in new infrastructure, with an efficient network of rail systems such as the European train system provides. The European train system is a model worthy of serious consideration here in the U.S. In Europe, gasoline is even more costly than here in the U.S. Daily automobile use is a luxury enjoyed only by the very affluent European.

The high-speed European trains are an absolute delight for tourists and commuters alike. Traveling safely and smoothly at speeds up to 300 miles per hour, you can leave Paris at 10:00 a.m. and be at the Spanish border by 7:00 p.m. or travel from London to Paris in just over an hour! You zip along, seated in roomy and comfortable seats, with a large private dining table equipped with an attractive banker's style lamp. Catch up on reading or work, watch the scenery, take a nap and enjoy a nice meal to pass the time. You arrive at your destination rested and refreshed instead of worn out and stressed from maneuvering endless stretches of freeway. Concerns over driving in bad weather are no longer part of the equation.

European trains follow routes laid out in a manner similar to our state highways and Interstates, such that you can reach almost any town in Europe by rail as easily as we do by car here. Doesn't it make good economic sense to give this

idea some thought? Hmm. Maybe I'll write my Congressman. Perhaps you should too!