

WaPo is Wrong, Wrong, Wrong

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 12, 2011 | Distinctly Catholic

This morning, the [editors of the Washington Post weigh in](#) [1] on plans to build a high speed rail system in California. They raise understandable worries about the plans for the rail system, the imprecise studies about ridership, etc. These are all important issues, although the editors of the Post exercised far less scrutiny when looking at the studies that they claimed justified a new "Purple Line" in DC's suburbs.

But, the Post's editors have missed the forest for the trees. America no longer builds great public works. Most visitors to Washington will have gone to Union Station, the magnificent train terminal opened in 1907. Penn Station in New York used to be a similarly grand structure until it was torn down. Grand Central Station continues to impress with its architecture and its utility. Why do we not build such grand structures anymore? The editors of the Post are not the only ones who fail to see the value of great public works projects. In retrospect, President Obama's stimulus bill should have focused almost exclusively on large infrastructure construction and not only regarding train terminals. There is nothing elegant and imposing about sewers, but where would we be without them? But part of building an appealing rail network, the kind travelers will want to use, is to build grand terminal stations that become hubs of commercial activity with shops and restaurants as well as providing a nexus for intermodal transportation networks. These projects are labor intensive and the tax payers would see what they are getting for their money.

The Post also writes that they doubt rail will be able to compete with interstate highways. Hello? Ever been stuck on a Los Angeles freeway? On a Saturday afternoon? Besides, anyone who has stood around in LAX waiting for a connection to SFO knows that if there was a fast, high-speed rail connection to San Francisco, people would use it.

Our political class - and sometimes our editorial class - suffers from a lack of can-do, imaginative spirit. What a shame. For penance, they should have to spend a lot of time in the current Penn Station.

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[1] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/11/AR2011011106259.html>