

Forcing mass transit on people has unintended consequences

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by [Randy Bright](#)

Last week, my wife and I spent nearly a week in the Calgary, Alberta, Canada area, spending most of our time in Banff, Lake Louise and Canmore. While Calgary is nearly an hour's drive to the mountains, the other three are in the Canadian Rockies. The beauty of the mountains, well-designed and attractive architecture, and the ambiance of these are truly worth the time to see.

We did not spend much time in Calgary, but we did manage to take in some of the sights there.

Calgary has a beautiful downtown area, which is comparable in size to Tulsa's downtown. Their airport also is about the size of ours, and it too, was a remarkable place.

However, Calgary's housing subdivisions were like nothing I have ever seen. Vast areas of rooftops of the same color and slope, exterior walls of the same or similar colors, and placed so closely together that the subdivisions were nearly or completely devoid of trees. It was obvious to me that it would have been impossible to plant any. We also saw Calgary's light rail, which crisscrosses the city.

Upon returning home, an article online by a South African author on the *Daily Maverick* blog caught my eye. *Public Mass Transit: Nobody Gets It Right* by Ivo Vegter explained the expensive boondoggle that mass transit has become. He quoted an official, whose capacity was to inform Parliament about public spending matters, who said. "Projected operational shortfalls of urban transport networks are well in excess of what most cities can afford."

Vegter stated, "Worldwide, there has been a fever for building new mass transit systems among those who advocate a 'new urbanism' to combat sprawl and reduce pollution."

Despite the official's confirmation of the fact that mass transit is too expensive, he (the official) proposed the typical solution of social programs that don't work – just keep trying to make it work. Vegter wrote that the official proposed "transit-oriented development" which would "create land use patterns that are able to drive a more sustainable demand for transport."

Pointing out that government mandates and regulations have made mass transit so expensive that it can only be paid for by taxpayers, Vegter contends that forcing mass transit on the public and forcing the public to change its environment to adapt to it has another consequence – undermining innovative services and the economy: "It will also undermine metered taxis, and ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft which are rapidly increasing in popularity because they better meet the market's needs. One might have an ideological or public planning preference for mass transit, but it isn't right to use government force to destroy private businesses..."

The official had an answer for that as well. “Poor regulation and inadequate law enforcement allow illegal competition to undermine the urban transport system.” In Vetger’s words, “in his eyes, private operators are the villains”.

Earlier this year, the *American Thinker* posted an article entitled. “Jerry Brown’s Bullet Train Fiasco and Trump.” It stated that just the first 118 miles of the Bay Area-to-Los Angeles bullet train project could be \$3.6 billion over budget (a 50 percent increase from projections), and that “building bridges, viaducts, trenches and track from Merced to Shafter, just north of Bakersfield, could cost \$9.5 billion to \$10 billion, compared with the original budget of \$6.4 billion.”

There is a place for rail traffic from city to city, but this is primarily for moving goods on established railways lines. This is an efficient and economical way to move heavy and bulky goods. If these same rails can be used for moving people, and if it can be done by private companies instead of government, so be it.

New rail traffic, especially in urban areas, is not so practical. It requires a tremendous amount of land requiring condemnation and confiscation of private property. Construction costs are staggeringly high and cannot be justified for a ridership of about 4 percent of their population, especially at a time when cities are struggling to maintain its own streets and infrastructure. Not to mention, it is extremely inefficient in moving people to their ultimate destinations as rails cover only a tiny portion of the city.

Cities would be better served by placing capital into its streets, where vehicular traffic will make all of its city accessible to all of its residents. Mass transit is a symbol of government at its worst and nothing that any government can afford without heavy taxation.



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