

---

**LAS VEGAS SUN**

---

**BRIAN GREENSPUN: WHERE I STAND:**

# Former governors press for maglev

## Clean, high-tech trains called sound investments

**By [Brian Greenspun](#) ([contact](#))**

Sun, May 24, 2009 (2 a.m.)

*When two of the most popular former Nevada governors — Republican Kenny Guinn and Democrat Bob Miller — get together to support an idea they think is important, it is my responsibility to step aside and give this space to them so readers may benefit from their wisdom.*

When lawmakers debated President Barack Obama's stimulus package this year, many were quick to criticize proposed funding for high-speed rail transportation. Specific projects, including those supported by innovative and proven technologies, became the focus of sound bites and innuendo.

However, it's with good reason that the Obama administration is pursuing a comprehensive high-speed rail strategy. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, highway congestion caused urban Americans to travel an additional 4.2 billion hours and purchase an extra 2.9 billion gallons of fuel in 2007, resulting in a congestion cost of \$78 billion. U.S. traffic has doubled over the past 25 years, yet highway capacity has increased only marginally during the same period with no new high-speed rail systems in place.

In response, the president and secretary of transportation have signaled their intention to build a world-class network of high-speed passenger rail corridors by investing \$8 billion provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. A few years ago the concept of rail travel seemed destined for the history books. Today, public and private sector organizations are working together to bring our nation's railroads into the 21st century.

But if the administration wants to make a lasting contribution to our transportation system, it needs to invest in next-generation technologies such as the magnetic levitation (maglev) system built in Shanghai and operating with a 99.98 percent on-time performance, having traveled 3.5 million miles and carried 18 million passengers; systems that are both sustainable and renew the American people's enthusiasm for rail travel. Surprisingly, despite the nation's increased focus on environmentally responsible and highly efficient automobiles, there is no agreed-upon technology for modernizing U.S. railways. It is time we agreed that maglev technology, frequently overlooked, ought to be part of that standard.

Maglev is emissions-free, does not rely upon foreign or domestic oil and uses less energy and emits far fewer pollutants than traditional forms of ground or air transportation. This dramatically reduces CO2 emissions on the highways.

Instead of using wheels, maglev trains hover above the tracks — or guideways — levitated by magnetic

force and propelled by electricity. There is no physical contact between the train and the guideway, which eliminates friction and enables high speeds with little to no noise. The base of the train wraps around the guideway and the train therefore cannot derail. Additionally, while the tracks of traditional trains require frequent maintenance and repair, the maglev train guideway, or track, is expected to be in service for 60 years or more with minimal maintenance.

Just as important, maglev train technology, which originated in the United States, was developed in Germany and has been fully certified and operational in Germany on a 20-mile track for more than a decade with the ninth generation of trains now in service. Shanghai has embraced this technology and provides the first commercial maglev passenger service to and from its new Pudong International Airport, reaching unprecedented ground speeds of more than 275 mph in daily operation (twice as fast as Amtrak's fastest commuter train). By comparison, a Boeing 777 commercial airplane used for long-range flights can reach a cruising speed of 550 mph.

Yet for some reason maglev in the U.S. has yet to be widely embraced. It can be understood why this is the case in Europe, given its intricate, interconnected network of traditional and high-speed passenger trains with maximum speeds of 180 mph. In this country, however, we have the advantage of starting fresh.

We can paint the high-speed rail picture any way we want to. And, given the lack of a preexisting passenger rail infrastructure and great distances between U.S. cities (especially in the West and Midwest), the advantages of safe, environmentally responsible and state-of-the-art 300-mph maglev technology should be obvious.

The California-Nevada Interstate Maglev Project, which our administrations helped spearhead through local public-private partnerships, is one such effort that deserves the nation's support.

The full corridor of this rail project will create nearly 100,000 jobs, generate \$12 billion in economic output and add \$3.4 billion in household income. Benefits also include economic development effects, such as construction, operation and maintenance jobs as well as commercial and residential development around stations or in the adjacent corridor. According to the range published by the Federal Railroad Administration, maglev within this corridor can be constructed within the same cost-per-mile (\$30 million to \$50 million) as advanced European-style high-speed rail.

The project will also help ease land consumption issues, effects on wetlands, endangered species and community disruption. The complete 269-mile corridor will use less than 1 percent of the available electricity on existing grids.

While addressing the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Miami last summer, President Obama commented, "I don't want to see the fastest train in the world built halfway around the world in Shanghai. I want to see it built right here in the United States of America."

We couldn't agree more. Regardless of what critics say, everyone has a role to play in creating and supporting a modern U.S. transportation system for the 21st century. Consumers, our economy and our shared environment deserve no less.

Brian Greenspun is editor of the Las Vegas Sun.

**PRWeb for Press Releases**

Distribute Your News to the Media & Consumers. Over 100,000 Contacts!

**V:VneMotion Inc.**

Ads by Google



© [Las Vegas Sun](#), 2009, All Rights Reserved. [Job openings](#). Published since 1950. [Contact us](#) to report news, errors or for advertising opportunities.