



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 29, 2011

Is ObamaRail the New ObamaCare?

ObamaCare proved to be a winning issue for Republicans last November, and rightly so: It is expensive, intrusive, and ? most especially ? unconstitutional. What is the next expensive, intrusive, unconstitutional Obama project that the GOP can use to win the next election? According to *The Hill*, it?s Obama?s plan to provide 80 percent of Americans with access to high-speed rail over the next 25 years, a boondoggle the newspaper dubs ?ObamaRail.?



The plan is expensive. It is ultimately expected to cost \$500 billion, an estimate likely to be greatly exceeded, as is usually the case with government projects. The federal government, already 20,000 leagues under a sea of red ink, surely cannot afford this; and states, which will initially receive subsidies from Washington to build the railroads, will then be saddled with the cost of maintaining the systems and, undoubtedly, subsidizing ticket prices. (Forty years after creating Amtrak, the federal government is still heavily subsidizing its fares.) Because of the expected long-term expenses, Florida Gov. Rick Scott, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, all Republicans, [turned down billions of dollars](#) in federal subsidies for high-speed rail projects in their states.

ObamaRail is also intrusive. As Raven Clabough [reported](#) in *The New American*, a federal high-speed rail project is already under way in California, and Golden State farmers have voiced apprehension over the possibility of having their lands bisected by the train, which is to say they fear their land will be taken from them, over their objections, via eminent domain. (Clabough also quoted a Fox News report on the project which noted critics say money is being misspent, ridership studies are inflated, the route is politically corrupted and the system will never be self-supporting par for the course with government projects.) TNAs Dave Bohon [warned](#) of the pressure that would likely come from environmentalists and others, should a federalized rail service move forward, to take private vehicles out of the hands of Americans and force them to use public transportation. And despite Obamas assurances that passengers on high-speed trains could travel without the pat-down often administered to airline



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passengers by the Transportation Security Administration, the fact that the TSA recently [engaged in intrusive searches](#) of passengers exiting an Amtrak train in Georgia gives Americans plenty of cause to doubt the Presidents word.

Obamas high-speed rail project is also, of course, unconstitutional. The Constitution does not grant the federal government the authority to subsidize railroads or any other type of transportation, Washingtons long history of doing so notwithstanding.

No matter how problematic a government initiative is, however, it always has its backers. In the case of ObamaRail, *The Hill* writes that some of those backers are Republicans who have been caught off guard by the vehemence of Republican critics.

Florida Rep. John Mica, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, is one such Republican fan of ObamaRail. Describing himself as one of the strongest supporters of high-speed rail in the House, Mica told *The Hill* that the increased partisanship of rail politics is Obamas fault. To Mica, all the drawbacks of federal railroad projects, not least of which is their unconstitutionality, are not reason enough for Republicans to oppose them. (House Republicans have proposed cutting \$1 billion in high-speed rail funding this year.) Mica even correctly described Amtrak as a Soviet-style train operation, failing to see that all government railroads, as socialist projects, are bound to operate in the same fashion. The problem, in his opinion, is simply bad salesmanship on the part of the President: Mica said the administration should have concentrated its rail efforts on the densely-populated northeast corridor. He added many of the projects proposed by the Obama administration are not truly high-speed, the paper writes.

Another Republican ObamaRail supporter is American Conservative Union President Al Cardenas, who said of GOP opposition, This is the most significant headwind weve had in 50 years. Cardenas, a former chairman of the Florida Republican Party who is now registered to lobby for high-speed rail, longs for the days when there was a bipartisan consensus in Washington and state capitals in favor of ever more infrastructure spending, saying, It was a matter of dollar separation, not where you [are] doing something or not. Transportation budget negotiations between the House and Senate were the easiest conferences to attend, he added, reports *The Hill*.

William Millar, president of Americans for Public Transportation, agreed, telling the newspaper, Republicans have a long history of supporting infrastructure projects.

In fact, as Millar pointed out, Obamas push for high-speed rail is as is so often the case merely a continuation of one of his predecessors policies. In 2008 Republican President George W. Bush signed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which Millar said started the federal push for high-speed rail, writes *The Hill*. Eighty-seven Republicans voted for the bill in the House of Representatives; the Senate passed it by unanimous consent. Republicans only now grouching about the high cost of federal high-speed rail projects should be prepared to be tarred, with some justification, as hypocrites and partisans.

Nevertheless, the fact that the GOP thinks opposition to ObamaRail is a winning issue may signal a shift in the public mood against such expensive, wasteful federal projects, just as the success of ObamaCare opposition demonstrated that Americans dont much care for Uncle Sams playing doctor when they are serving as the patients. Conservatives may find that successful opposition to the Presidents speedy locomotion notion can be used to run even more proponents of big government out of Washington on a rail.



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