



E-Alert
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NCPA Study: Rail Is More Expensive, Not Environmentally Friendlier

July 12, 2012 (Dallas, TX)—When compared to commuting rail transit is slow, inconvenient and expensive, according to [new research](#) from the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA).

“Contrary to popular belief transit is not much more environmentally friendly than automobiles,” said Randall O’Toole, author of the study. “When all subsidies are counted it costs several times more per passenger mile than driving.”

Even if, as supporters of rail transit advocate, more Americans lived in multi-family housing close to transit stops, the benefits of rail transit are questionable, according to the study.

- According to the Department of Energy, the average passenger car uses about 3,500 BTUs per passenger mile and the average light truck uses about 3,900 BTUs (2009).
- By comparison, the average urban transit bus uses more than 4,200 BTUs per passenger mile.
- And rail transit, except in heavily trafficked New York City, uses far more energy. For example, Baltimore used approximately 6,000 BTUs per passenger mile, Cleveland more than 8,000 BTUs, Miami more than 5,400 BTUs and Pittsburgh more than 11,000 BTUs.

In addition, the study notes that transit energy efficiencies have been stagnant or declining for the past several decades, while auto energy efficiencies are improving.

With regard to environmental concerns, greenhouse gas emissions for petroleum-powered vehicles are proportional to fuel consumption, so bus transit is worse than commuting. For electric-powered vehicles emissions depend on the power source—coal or other fossil fuels—and therefore is often much less “green” than driving.

“From an environmental perspective transit doesn’t have much to recommend it,” said NCPA Senior Fellow [H. Sterling Burnett](#). “Cars today are producing only one percent of the pollution they emitted in the 1970s; buses and trains, by comparison, have made only slight improvements.”

Finally, the study shows that because transit is generally slower and less convenient than driving, the cost is much greater—a fact that is disguised by the much larger subsidies given to transit.

[Which is Better for the Environment: Transit or Roads? - http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/ib111.pdf](http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/ib111.pdf)

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[H. Sterling Burnett](#), Ph.D., is one of the country's leading authorities on energy and environmental issues. He is the lead analyst of the National Center for Policy Analysis' (NCPA) E-Team. Burnett's area of expertise includes topics that affect every American, such as government environmental policy, offshore drilling, global warming, endangered species and public lands.

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