

Overnight 'Sleeper' Bus Service Has Started in California — Is It Coming to the East Coast?

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We've all enjoyed a nap on Metro-North. The swaying action seems to induce a nodding-off, especially on the way home after a long day in the city. But it's sleeping comfortably during long distance travel that seems like the holy grail for travelers.

On overnight flights to Europe we're envious of those business class folks with their lie-flat seats. And on Amtrak, even the comfiest reclining coach seat can't compare with the beds in the sleeper — be it a one-person roomette or a deluxe bedroom. And of course, on cruise ships, everyone has some sort of a bunk in a stateroom or otherwise.

Now, you can add a new form of transport offering “sleeper” accommodations: the bus. Yes, a new California start-up called Cabin is offering nightly bus service between Los Angeles and San Francisco in specially equipped coaches, each offering 24 “cabins” (bunk beds). The coach leaves each city at 11 pm and arrives at its destination at 7 am the following morning.

Driving time from LA to SF can be as little as six hours, but this “hotel on wheels” looks for the smoothest route, not the fastest, so as to not disturb slumbering passengers.

The “cabins” look small but offer clean linens, duvets, free earplugs, melatonin-infused water and free Wi-Fi. One six-foot tall reviewer said she had plenty of room to stretch out, though she did have trouble sleeping. Mind you, all cabins are single occupancy only, so don’t get any ideas.

For the insomniacs, there’s a small passenger lounge and a 24-hour attendant. All passengers share one lavatory and, unlike Amtrak’s overnight trains, there is no on-board shower. In the morning, there’s coffee available to wean you off the melatonin water.

Each passenger can bring two pieces of luggage at no additional charge. And you can show up as little as 10 minutes before departure time. Try doing that at an airport.

The Cabin isn’t the cheapest way between California’s twin cities. Megabus makes an overnight run (regular coach seating) for \$20 one way. The average airline fare is about \$220 while Amtrak’s celebrated “Coast Starlight” makes the daylight run for as little as \$64 in coach (\$178 in a Roomette). Cabin’s fare is \$115 each way and the bus often books up days in advance.

Clearly, the attraction is one of making best use of your time, not the speed or comfort of the trip. To the mostly-millennial target audience, sleep is a necessary distraction from work, so if you can multi-task during your overnight hours (sleep and travel), all the better.

Cabin’s backers have secured \$3.3 million in underwriting and have their sights on expanding service to other cities like Portland and Las Vegas. Their real dream is to use self-driving technology and eventually have the Cabins cruise without drivers. (Now that could induce some sleeplessness!)

Alas, I couldn’t find anyone on the east coast copying the Cabin’s service. New York and Boston are only four hours apart, by bus or Acela. From the Big Apple to DC is just three hours by train and maybe four by bus. Both are just too short for a good night’s sleep.

So for now, to sample the concept of “sleeper” bus transport, you’ll just have to “Go west” young man ... “Go west!”

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