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Relocate Rail Lines Next to I-95? Wrong, Wrong, Wrong: Cameron on Transportation

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It takes about four hours to travel nearly 820 miles in China by high-speed rail — averaging 200 mph — between Beijing and Shanghai.

A 230-mile [Amtrak](#) ride from New York to Boston — averaging 65 mph — will take at least three and a half hours.

Why the difference?

The U.S. is a third-world nation when it comes to railroading. The tracks are old and full of curves compared

to China's modern, straight rail beds.

Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation [Ray LaHood](#) marveled at China's best-in-class high speed rail (HSR) system when he toured it a few years ago.

The Chinese government drew a straight line to determine the path of the HSR. Anything and anyone in the way was out of luck.

That's not the case in the U.S. One example is the [Federal Railroad Administration](#)'s plans to build HSR between Washington and Boston. The initial plan was to straighten track in Connecticut, plowing through historic towns like Old Lyme. Local opposition and the engagement of the state's elected officials all but killed the plan.

But the FRA's recent revised plans delivered only a partial victory for Connecticut preservationists. Old Lyme was saved, but the FRA still has plans to change the landscapes of southwestern Connecticut communities.

Buried in [the 61-page document](#) is a plan to reroute tracks from New Rochelle, N.Y. to Greens Farms on a new path alongside Interstate 95. This would mean major disruption for everyone from Greenwich to Norwalk, with massive construction right in the heart of those communities.

The details are few: just a [fuzzy map](#) showing the proposed HSR tracks somewhere near the interstate, avoiding our century-old rail bridges and replacing them with highway-style elevated structures.

With Gov. Dannel Malloy still calling for a widening of I-95, where would these new tracks be placed? The FRA says it doesn't know. But if you drive that sound-barriered highway corridor, you'll see there isn't much room for new tracks or highway lanes — let alone both.

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Local officials, residents and commuters should all be concerned. While the balance of the FRA's plans in the state call for an upgrade of existing tracks, why is there a need for this invasive new structure in the already crowded highway corridor? Why not just rebuild the existing tracks?

Better yet, why not re-visit the idea of the “inland route,” sending trains to Boston north through Westchester County before heading east along Interstate 84 through Danbury, Waterbury and Hartford? There’s more open space and a better chance to build straight, truly HSR tracks.

That idea was rejected by the state, fearing loss of rail connectivity for coastal business centers such as Stamford, Bridgeport and New Haven, despite Amtrak’s promise to still run Acela service along the shore.

We are not in China, nor should we allow the FRA to tell us how to live. Our last hope in opposing this land-grab is the necessary environmental review of the FRA’s plans.

Now would be the time to tell Washington: “No!”

Jim Cameron on Trains

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