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One Country Has Almost 2/3 of High Speed Rail Lines, Has 4X the U.S. Transport Budget: Cameron on Transportation

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What country has the largest interstate highway system in the world? Hint: It's not the United States.

What country has the most miles of high-speed rail? Hint: It's not France or Japan.

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The answer to both questions is: China.

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most of them built since 1984, now cover almost twice as many miles as the U.S. interstates. On the rail side, China's 15,000 miles of high-speed rail represents nearly two-thirds of all such rail in the world.

China's fast trains travel up to 217 mph, linking Beijing to Shanghai (the distance of New York to Chicago) in a five-hour run. Trains each carrying 1,000 passengers depart at 10- to 15-minute intervals. Compare that to Amtrak's Acela, running once an hour, carrying 300 passengers at an average of 70 mph.

Sure, China is big. Though measured in square miles, the U.S. is slightly larger. But with a population of 1.34 billion, China is huge compared to the 325 million American residents. That means China has a lot more people to move, and they're investing accordingly.

China spends more than \$300 billion annually on transportation. Compare that to the U.S. Department of Transportation's \$80 billion annual spending on highways, rail and air transport. No wonder we feel like we're living in a third-world country with crumbling roads and obsolete railroads.

But more importantly, China is also investing abroad. Chinese money is being invested in 68 countries to build highways, ports and railroads to take its exports to market on what it sees as a 21st century Silk Road.

China's "Belt & Road Initiative" has pledged \$8 trillion for projects in under-developed countries where it will be able to conduct trade. These destinations account for 70 percent of the world's population, 55 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy reserves.

There is already a rail link from China to Europe with daily trains exporting electronics and manufactured goods. After unloading, those trains return to China filled with food. A trip that can take a month by sea now links 35 Chinese cities with several in Europe in just 15 days by rail.

On the high seas, China is also expanding its reach, building a modern fleet of vessels and investing heavily in port operations in Europe and South America. Containers filled with cellphones sail out from Chinese ports and much-needed oil is returned. And where Chinese merchant vessels go, so too will its Navy. While the U.S. fancies itself as policeman to the world, there's no way we can keep up.

The U.S. merchant marine has only 175 American-owned vessels flying our flag while 800 others are registered abroad. The Chinese government-owned COSCO shipping conglomerate owns 1,114 vessels, the fourth-largest fleet in the world. And that's just one company.

President Donald Trump seems headed to an all-out trade war with China, matching them tariff for tariff and tweeting regularly about how "unfair" the Beijing government has been to us.

Meanwhile, Washington can't even pass a domestic infrastructure spending bill to patch our decrepit roads and rails. To my thinking, we're not only getting outspent by China, but clearly out-smarted. Transportation is about trade and China is planning for the future while we wallow in the past.

Cameron on Trains

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