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Buy the ticket for high-speed trains

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Imagine slashing your travel budget. Imagine avoiding traffic congestion. Imagine getting more work done as you travel to your early-morning appointment in a city within 400 miles.

Imagine the Ohio Hub starting in seven years linking Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati - and later Dayton, Toledo and destinations throughout the Midwest and beyond.

It's hard to imagine since this high-speed rail is just a vision here now. But it's commonplace in Europe, and leaders at the Ohio Rail Development Commission believe it will become a reality here based on a new study.

Economic and environmental factors should succeed in driving trains traveling at 110 mph as a preferred mode of transportation.

The study found that high-speed rail could draw 9.3 million passengers a year by 2025, with about 80 percent of them coming off the roadways.

Additionally, it would create an estimated 54,000 jobs, and Ohio Hub planners believe it would make enough money from passenger fares to pay its own bills.

At this juncture, it's uncertain if people will be attracted to high-speed rail. With gas prices hovering around \$3 a gallon, however, the savings could mount quickly for people.

This would please officials at the Ohio Department of Transportation. Less traffic on highways translates into savings on building and repairing roads each year. The study shows it could offset \$2 billion in road maintenance expenses by 2025. Add the estimated 50 years and hefty cost to bring 75,000 structurally deficient bridges up to standard and the potential savings becomes substantial.

That's as long as rail service survives without government subsidies.

The added benefit would be to the environment. Fewer vehicles on the road should improve air quality.

The Ohio Hub would ultimately connect passengers in Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Niagara Falls, Toronto and elsewhere.

This ambitious plan requires cooperation from privately owned railroad companies. The federal and state governments also must allocate money so the Ohio Hub can take the next step.

If the Hub is constructed, approvals from multiple communities must be secured. But it's hard to imagine why Ohioans and other Midwesterners wouldn't profit from it.

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