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Wednesday, January 23, 2008 3:57 AM EST

At the very least, it can do no harm for Sandusky City Commissioners to vote in support of an effort to secure federal funding to make northern Ohio part of a high-speed regional passenger rail network.

At best, it can connect us to the rest of the Midwest, paying off in ways we can't fully appreciate.

Pipe dream, say some, but as fuel prices climb and our roads and bridges crumble under loads they weren't designed to handle, this idea -- pushed now for several years by a group called OHIO-HUB, which has a section on the Ohio Department of Transportation Web site -- seems to be more of a realistic alternative to our co-dependent relationship with our cars.

This isn't to be confused with "light rail," which operates within large cities, and of which downtown Detroit's largely irrelevant "People Mover" is a particularly embarrassing example. These would be full-sized trains linking cities across the Midwest .

There are obstacles, to be sure. Passenger rail will, for the foreseeable future, depend on existing lines on which freight has priority. And passenger rail of any type around here has to overcome the perception it's just easier to drive to most places along the North Coast. It is -- for now.

But plenty would take the train if it were cheaper and more practical than driving everywhere. Clearly, Amtrak's hours-late arrivals can't be the standard-setter here.

We can't see the train completely replacing the car.

But there are plenty of good reasons for people to travel to Cleveland -- or Columbus, or Chicago, or Pittsburgh, or New York, or from those places to here -- and the train just might make it easier. And if enough people take the train, cutting down on fuel use and on the wear and tear on our roads, it's worth while.