Private Transportation Alternatives

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What Exactly is the Green New Deal?

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**Alternatives to gas-powered vehicles**

* Short distance / in city: bikes, scooters, hoverboards, electric scooters/bikes, roller skates; need more adapted lanes for these.
* Longer distances: Hybrids and fully electric vehicles / [Map of states’ incentives for electric and hybrid vehicles](http://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/state-electric-vehicle-incentives-state-chart.aspx)

**Electric and hybrid vehicles**

Many states are considering a variety of incentives to promote hybrid and plug-in electric vehicle adoption. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia offer incentives—as of July 2017—that would provide high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane exemptions, financial incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles or purchase of electric vehicle supply equipment ([EVSE](http://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/state-electric-vehicle-incentives-state-chart.aspx)), vehicle inspections or emissions test exemptions, parking incentives, or utility rate reductions.

In May 2014, eight states released an action plan detailing an agreement originally announced in 2013 to put 3.3 million zero-emission vehicles ([ZEVs](http://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/state-electric-vehicle-incentives-state-chart.aspx)) on the road by 2025. The plan—agreed to by California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont—calls for consumer incentives to promote ZEVs such as high-occupancy vehicle ([HOV](http://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/state-electric-vehicle-incentives-state-chart.aspx)) lane access and building additional charging stations.

State legislatures and governors are not the only ones offering incentives for plug-in electric vehicles. Some electric  utility companies in Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland and Pennsylvania, for example, offered a $10,000 rebate to their customers and employees for the purchase of a new 2017 Nissan Leaf at participating dealerships through June 30, 2017.

**Improved public transportation**

This is where so many cities are falling short. Some cities and states are encouraging alternative transport.

Seattle is doing a really good job of both expanding its rail system and improving its bus system at the same time, and actually linking the two systems together to make a much more useful system overall. And not coincidentally, it’s one of the few US cities where transit ridership is growing.

Some smaller cities are doing a very good job of building transit networks and, in many cases, are actually more impressive than in larger cities. Richmond, Virginia, just redesigned their bus network and built a new BRT [bus rapid transit] to go along with it. I think it’s a really smart implementation. The bus rapid transit in Hartford, Connecticut, is a really good network.

Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) is another case of a really good bus network including some new routes — like the A Line which I think is probably one of the best bus routes in the country, just in terms of how good the passenger experience of riding the bus is. That links very well with two rail lines that connect at exactly the right places that really connect a lot of major centers together.

There’s a tendency to focus too much on longer regional trips when the strongest transit markets are often in the denser core. You’ll see San Francisco has been investing a huge amount of money into long suburban rail extensions to very low-density areas where they simply aren’t getting a lot of ridership because there aren’t a lot of people there, but those lines look impressive on a map. If you draw a map of the whole region, those look like they’re doing a lot. And they also respond to political jurisdictions where you see a lot of pull.

Biggest challenges

* Costs and maintenance
* Convincing people to give up a parking lane for a bus lane / bike lane

**Longer distance travel**

[2018 has birthed some new transit projects](https://www.curbed.com/2018/1/18/16898246/transportation-construction-projects-biggest-us-2018), including a high-speed rail line from New Haven to Hartford, Connecticut, and the TEXRail, which will travel from downtown Fort Worth to DFW Airport.

High-speed rail is one of the principal pillars of the [Green New Deal](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/climate/green-new-deal.html) drafted by liberal House Democrats, including [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](https://twitter.com/AOC). It [proposes](https://www.npr.org/2019/02/07/691997301/rep-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-releases-green-new-deal-outline) to overhaul the "transportation systems in the United States to eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector as much as is technologically feasible," with high-speed rail as one of the main investments.

But outside of speculation… [there are HSR projects that are actually in the works](https://www.cnet.com/news/is-high-speed-rail-in-the-us-ever-going-to-happen/).

**California**: Northern California to Southern, linking Sacramento and San Francisco to Los Angeles and a few points in between

On the negative side, even at the very high speeds the project is hoping for, it will still take 2 hours, 40 minutes to get from Union Station in LA to downtown San Francisco. It's only 1.5 hours to fly, so even considering travel to and from airports, that's nearly a wash. It's hard to believe they'll be able to keep ticket prices low enough to compete with airfare, which is often around $60 (roughly £45 or AU$85) each way. California HSR Authority says they're aiming for an average price of $93 to get from San Francisco to LA, in today's dollars. This is about 50 percent higher than a flight, but still in the "ballpark." Personally I'd pay an extra $30 not to fly, and hopefully others will find the premium acceptable too.

California HSR Authority intends for the entire system to run on 100 percent renewable energy to power the trains. Since traveling on these trains would mean fewer cars on the road and fewer passengers on airplanes, the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions should be sizable.

**Florida:** Miami to West Palm Beach

This is is too slow to qualify as high speed. However, it's working on expanding its system north, [connecting to Orlando airport via Cocoa](https://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/news/2018/12/19/brightlines-orlando-to-west-palm-construction.html). Part of this route will have new tracks on a new right-of-way, allowing speeds up to 125 mph. Along with other funding, [it's going public](https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2019/01/30/virgin-trains-is-about-to-offer-500-million-worth-of-stock-to-fund-its-orlando-track) to help get the money it needs. The company has plans to [connect to Tampa eventually as well](https://www.tampabay.com/business/brightline-virgin-proposal-for-tampa-to-orlando-rail-service-heads-to-key-decision-20181128/).

**Nevada:** Las Vegas to California(Victorville—eventually LA)

**Northeast corridor:** New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and DC

[Amtrak has extensive plans](https://nec.amtrak.com/nec-vision/) for upgrading the tracks it owns, as well as working with states along the route to improve the non-Amtrak sections. The Acela trains were always far more capable than the tracks they were on, so even seemingly small improvements like raising speeds on a 30 mph section to 50 mph will reap big benefits overall. Many of the improvements will also benefit standard rail service in the area as well.

Amtrak is also getting new trains, due in service in 2021. These high-tech models from Alstom are not just capable of higher speeds but have better tilt capabilities, so they'll be faster on the slower sections compared to the current trains. If the infrastructure improvements go as planned, new top speeds of 186 mph will be possible on some segments of the route.

**Texas**

Texas Central Rail is aiming to connect Dallas and Houston in under 90 minutes. Driving would take at least 3.5 hours.

Most recently, the TCR has selected Spain's [Renfe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renfe_Operadora" \t "_blank) to be the train operator ([PDF](https://www.texascentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/TCR_Renfe_release_20181010.pdf)). Initially Renfe will offer technical advice on design and construction of the system, then once it's up and running, it'll "run the trains; maintain system components, such as the engines, signals and other equipment; oversee ticketing, passenger loyalty programs and other services."

It's hoping for departures every 30 minutes, a top speed of 200 mph, ticket prices lower than airfare, and a start date in the mid-2020s. Barring unforeseen delays, that will beat California's high-speed rail by years, likely making Texas Central Rail the first "true" high-speed rail system in the US by any definition.

Railroads need land, however, and so far Texas Central is having problems procuring it.