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Ignoring bullet train opportunity means losing

It's time America wakes up to our reliance on very old technology and face facts. Staying with the old and familiar will cost us our future.

As I read the Sounding Board comments regarding California high-speed rail published over four days ("Bullet-train debate hits 220 mph," May 30-June 3), I realized that generally, the criticism can be summarized as either "too expensive" or "the wrong project for government." A boondoggle.

Few suggest the idea of vision. High-speed rail is a 21st-century solution to 19th-century problems.

In this day and age, it's very easy to criticize, and honestly, the majority of time the criticism is earned. But this approach fails to capture the scope of the project and its potential rewards. You can't make an omelet unless you are willing to break some eggs, and it is without question that high-speed rail is a very fancy omelet.

Like many, I grew up in California and witnessed the sky's darkling with growth and popularity of the automobile beginning in the 1960s. At first, even the connection between smog and automobiles was disputed. But finally, after years of debate, it became uncontestable. Smog results from the incomplete burning process within the internal-combustion engine.

Few recognize the basic internal-combustion engine was developed and perfected before the turn of the 19th century. Even today, the basic engine design of a gasoline-fueled vehicle can trace its origins to the early designs of Belgian Jean Lenoir, who patented the four-cycle gasoline engine in 1860. The diesel engine, invented by German Rudolf Diesel in 1858, was granted its U.S. patent in 1898. European-born Nikola Tesla (1854) designed the basic vehicle-ignition system, which still is use today, more than a century ago. As the world develops and moves on to newer and greener technologies, why are Americans so committed to staying the course, which is actually harming us?

It's time America wakes up to our reliance on very old technology and face facts. Staying with the old and familiar will cost us our future. Our industrial leadership will continue to decline as naysayers and Chicken Littles, along with some popular politicians, increasingly see progress and progressive agendas as un-American.

Japan began the high-speed train revolution nearly 50 years ago and Europe 40 years ago. Paris and London were linked by high-speed rail in 1994. If America is going to remain competitive -- and there is serious doubt we can -- it will be with projects like California high-speed rail, which will put our industrial know-how and ability back in the running.

But from what I hear and read, the inclination is to not only do nothing, but move backward. It's complaining about taxes and illegals while the real prize is lost. Doing nothing will result in the loss of industrial leadership, with even more high-tech jobs going to Asia and Europe.

Can we really afford to become a second- or even third-rate nation? Are we ready to sink to a lower standard of living because we just do not have the vision to invest in tomorrow? Education is no different!

Do we want a better reality tomorrow? Reading the comments printed in The Californian, it's pretty clear we don't. The generalization I reach is that the majority is more concerned about protecting its small piece of the pie. Period. No new taxes. Lower educational standards, larger classrooms and closed libraries and public parks is the agenda for Kern County.

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