



Center for Transportation Excellence

Press Release

Contact: Jeremy Gunderson
(202) 244-2405
jer@cfte.org

February 23, 2004

“ ‘Great Rail Disasters’ Report Disastrous in its Analysis and Selection of Data: Fails to Show Entire Transit Picture”

Randal O’Toole and the “Center for the American Dream” have recently released a report entitled “Great Rail Disasters.” With its focus on anti-transit anecdotes, incomplete data and enthusiasm for single occupancy vehicles, this report must not be relied upon by anyone seeking to understand the true story of transit and its impact on communities.

“The O’Toole report uses incomplete and flawed data to paint an inaccurate and unflattering picture of the impact of rail transit on communities. Anyone who lives, works or travels through a community that has benefited from transit knows first-hand how these investments improve economic development and quality of life,” said Stephanie Vance, Program Manager for the Center for Transportation Excellence.

The Center for Transportation Excellence’s (CFTE’s) preliminary analysis shows that the O’Toole report’s centerpiece, the “Rail Livability Index” is fundamentally flawed. The factors used to determine this “Index” have been chosen and weighted for the sole purpose of discrediting transit. CFTE’s in-depth response is available at: www.cfte.org/news/O%27Toole%20response.pdf

For example, where O’Toole looks at “change in total transit ridership between 1990-2000” and finds decreases compared to other modes of transportation, he essentially compares transit trips, which are generally short-term commutes with all vehicle miles traveled in an entire urban area at all times of the day and night: This is akin to comparing apples and oranges. When one looks at a better measure, such as overall transit ridership growth in the U.S., one discovers that from 1996 to 2001, public transportation ridership grew 24%, faster than any other mode of transportation, **including** vehicle miles traveled. In fact, the O’Toole reports’ own figures demonstrate that 18 of the 23 cities evaluated enjoyed tremendous growth in ridership between 1990 and 200 – in some cases as high as 59%!

Clearly, the O’Toole approach fails to provide a useful and unbiased means of evaluating the impact of rail on communities.



Center for Transportation Excellence

In addition, the CFTE analysis demonstrates that O’Toole’s efforts to discredit individual communities are unfounded. For example, where the suggestion is made that Denver had 38 fatalities, in fact there were only 6. Further, the measurement of these fatalities on a “per billion passenger miles” basis makes no sense, given the fact that Denver’s relatively new system has not yet achieved the billion passenger mark.

“Many of the “failures” noted are simply incomprehensible,” said Vance. “If your light rail system generated \$2.3 billion in investments for every \$1 billion in public expenditures, would you call it a failure? If your light rail system enjoyed a 45% increase in ridership in one year would you call it a failure? And yet that is what O’Toole does in analyzing the Dallas-Ft. Worth DART system.”

The basic information upon which this report relies is fundamentally incomplete. When one considers all the evidence available regarding the benefits of public transportation both nationally and on a community-by-community basis, it is clear that the “Great Rail Disasters” report is flawed and should not be relied upon to tell the whole story.

About the Center for Transportation Excellence

The Center for Transportation Excellence (CFTE) is a clearinghouse for information in support of quality transportation choices. CFTE is committed to two main objectives: (1) defending the merits of transit and (2) equipping local leaders with the information they need to be successful with their public transportation initiatives and ballot measures. The Center can be found on the web at www.cfte.org

###