

The Green New Deal is Actually a Brown New Deal

The so-called “Green New Deal” supported by the Democrats’ leading candidates in 2020 would cost [trillions of dollars](#), and harm the economy and the environment while causing widespread unemployment. It would be better described as a Brown New Deal, because it would shut down many [carbon-free](#) power plants that don’t pollute our atmosphere. It would also finance energy-intensive, carbon-emitting government boondoggles backed by construction unions, such as unnecessary reconstruction of millions of commercial and residential buildings. It would pay for wasteful white-elephant transportation projects that will increase road congestion and congestion-related carbon emissions.

It also would shrink the economy by discouraging people from working. The “[Green New Deal](#)” [blueprint](#) provides “economic security” – that is, welfare benefits – “for all” Americans who are “[unwilling to work](#).” Encouraging people not to work will lead to less income tax revenue and increased government welfare spending. That will result in skyrocketing budget deficits, and help [bankrupt](#) the government, leaving it without the money needed to transition to a lower-carbon economy.

As Fortune magazine [noted](#), “Senators Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) are co-sponsors, according to the *Washington Post*. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who may also run for president, also backs the plan.” So do many other leading Democrats, [notes a journalist](#): “Almost every other candidate for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination in 2020 has also endorsed a ‘Green New Deal.’”

As Joel Pollak [notes](#), the Green New Deal is radical: “The [bill](#) proposes phasing out air travel, ‘upgrading all existing

buildings in the United States,’ and other radical proposals – without any plan to pay for the ‘transformation’ of the entire American economy.”

As Reason Magazine [notes](#), the Green New Deal’s plan to abolish air travel would hit Hawaii hard, because Hawaii is connected only by air with the U.S. mainland, and building a tunnel to Hawaii would take trillions of dollars and eons to complete. As one expert quoted by Reason notes, “The Green New Deal reads like word vomit from a 13-year-old child asked to scribble out their bold new thoughts for a radically different America than we have today.”

As Reason [observes](#),

From both a financial and practical standpoint, replacing planes with high-speed rail lines makes little sense. For one thing, “high-speed rail projects cost billions and billions”....Consider the [proposed](#) Texas line between Dallas and Houston, which could cost as much as \$20 billion. Both cities, notably, are in the same state, separated by less than 300 miles. Replacing air travel with high-speed rail would mean lines connecting every major city in the country, at least. “The amount of money you’d actually need to build these lines would be so far in the trillions, I don’t see how you would possibly get it done,” [transportation expert Baruch] Feigenbaum says.

But as Reason notes, the architect of [the Green New Deal](#)

doesn’t seem to care about the Green New Deal’s fiscal cost. She [told Business Insider](#) last month that Modern Monetary Theory—which [says](#) the government can essentially print and spend as much money as it wants, regardless of budget deficits or national debt—should “absolutely” be “a larger part of our conversation” about paying for her plan.

Putting this dubious reasoning to the side, her goal of

eliminating air travel still makes no sense. "The reason why people take air travel is generally because it's fast," Feigenbaum says, explaining that there are very few corridors where rail travel could realistically compete with planes. "If you're going across the country," he adds, then "obviously high-speed rail is not going to be compatible with air travel."

And it certainly wouldn't be too effective if you wanted to travel to, say, Hawaii. A high-speed rail between the West Coast and Hawaii would require underground tunneling, which would itself cost an astronomical amount. "I can't think of a number that's high enough," Feigenbaum says. "You're talking about more than trillions, I think, in order to build a line."

The Green New Deal's plan to eliminate air travel could increase, rather than reduce, greenhouse gas emissions. Even so-called "high speed" rail is less than half as fast as air travel, and construction of high-speed rail lines itself costs tens of billions of dollars and emits greenhouse gases. California's \$100 billion high-speed rail project, which is over a decade behind schedule, will utterly fail to provide the environmental benefits once touted for it.

As Marc Joffe notes in the [San Jose Mercury News](#),

While delays, cost overruns and an adverse state audit have fueled opposition to California's high-speed rail project, proponents still argue the system is needed to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

But, in the decade following passage of the bullet train ballot measure, the climate justification for high-speed rail has weakened considerably. It now appears that the bullet train, if ever completed, would provide little or no reduction in overall greenhouse-gas emissions.

As Steven Greenhut of the R Street Institute [notes](#), when it is finally completed [many years](#) from now, the \$100 billion rail project “will have ticket prices higher than airfares and will take nearly twice as long as flying to get from the Bay Area to Southern California.”

The Green New Deal would “increase greenhouse gas emissions” by abolishing nuclear power, [notes energy expert](#) Michael Shellenberger. The Green New Deal ignores the lessons of other countries like Germany, where greenhouse [gas emissions rose due to](#) the closure of nuclear power plants.

The Green New Deal would finance wasteful light-rail projects [backed by construction unions](#) that [few commuters](#) can or will use. As Greenhut notes, building such under-used rail projects doesn’t even help the environment. As Greenhut [observes](#):

“It has been around 15 years since Orange County tried to build a \$1 billion light-rail system that would have gone from one suburban parking lot to another. It would have moved around half of 1 percent of the county’s commuters. What I remember most about that incredibly shrinking [Centerline](#) was that while it was supposed to reduce congestion overall, it would actually have [increased congestion](#) along main thoroughfares.

People fly rather than go by train because it is quicker, easier, and usually cheaper to do so. As Greenhut [notes](#), in California,

“They take Southwest Airlines, which offers low-cost, quick flights serving the major airports. Yet former Gov. Jerry Brown had focused his attention on building a \$100-billion [high-speed rail system](#) that, if it ever is completed, will have ticket prices higher than airfares and will take nearly twice as long as flying to get from the Bay Area to Southern California. What is the point?

Such “high-speed” rail systems generally turn out to be white elephants. South Korea is [abolishing its celebrated high-speed rail line](#) from its capital, Seoul, to a nearby major city because it can’t cover even the marginal costs of keeping the trains running. Most people who ride trains don’t need maximum possible speed, and most of those who do will still take the plane to reach distant destinations.

Despite Japan’s much-vaunted bullet trains, most Japanese don’t take the bullet train either; they take buses because the bullet train is too expensive. Bullet trains do interfere with freight lines, so Japanese freight lines carry much less cargo than in the United States, where railroads – rather than trucks – carry most freight, thereby reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Green New Deal is incredibly unrealistic. It might just as well have proposed generating all of America’s energy [from unicorn droppings](#), notes one commentator.

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