

Electrified light rail is way of the future

By Robert Yuhnke

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Re: *"Prius effect; energy-efficient cars undercut the appeal of light rail," Aug. 16 Perspective.*

Weaning our transportation system from being hooked on oil is essential if we are to protect our energy independence in a competitive world, and save our grandchildren from the ominous threats to food production, water supplies, forests and wildlife posed by overheating the planet.

A new study by the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project shows that even if all passenger vehicles become as fuel efficient as a Prius (about 55 mpg), Colorado's carbon pollution from passenger vehicles would continue to climb above current levels because of the expected doubling of the state's population by 2050.

Only one scenario makes progress toward achieving the 80 percent reduction target set out by Gov. Bill Ritter's plan and the Obama administration: powering transportation vehicles with electricity generated here in Colorado, combined with measures to "green" the grid by replacing coal with natural gas, solar, wind and geothermal technologies to generate power.

Electrified light-rail trains emit no pollution and do not add to the region's health threat from ozone. The Prius Effect correctly observes that metro pollution comes from highly polluting power plants burning coal to generate electric power. Electric trains are not a cause of global warming. The solution is not to replace non-polluting trains with polluting cars; it is to electrify transport vehicles while eliminating the carbon emissions from power generation.

The Post story concedes that emissions per person traveling on light rail is not worse than a Prius if Xcel cleans up its emissions, or more people ride the trains. The climate-smart solutions will do both. Federally, Congress is acting to reducing Xcel's climate pollution at the power plant. Electrified light-rail trains will substitute clean power from Colorado's abundant solar and wind sources in place of imported oil.

Using locally generated electricity to power our personal and transit vehicles will save about 75 percent of the cost of petroleum fuels, while making the production of electricity as a transport fuel a major contributor to the local economy. Shifting to locally generated electricity could add as many as 5,000 jobs to Colorado's economy. Non-polluting light rail is the path to a low-carbon future.

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