

New Deal 2009? Three Plans to Rescue the Economy and the Earth with Public Transportation

by Jesse Fox, Tel Aviv, Israel on 11.29.08



Image via apolloalliance.org.

Change is definitely in the air these days. President-elect Obama is putting together his plans for [some sort of New Deal-like program](#), which he has said will include massive investments in building public institutions like schools, renewable energy and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, advocates for all sorts of policies are busy putting together their own proposals for the new administration in Washington. And with everyone from Wall Street traders to Detroit car makers bombarding the government with bailout requests, now just might be the time to get some new ideas into the discourse.

Below the fold - three plans to stimulate the economy, create millions of jobs and clean up the air by getting Americans out of their cars, and onto public transportation, especially trains.

Andy Kunz, www.urbandesign.org

We [interviewed Andy Kunz](#) almost a year ago about his plan for a nationwide, three-tiered train system to link up the nation's major urban centers. The centerpiece of his plan involves creating a network of high-speed trains as a sustainable alternative to air and road travel. Kunz's updated plan, which he calls [New Deal 2009](#), is based on high-speed rail networks in Europe and Asia.

Kunz points to five major crises: the collapsing economy and job losses, global warming and climate change, peak oil and energy security, crumbling infrastructure and a nationwide mobility crisis. The solution to all five of these major problems, according to Kunz, is a world-class rail system, which Kunz calls "a real bargain," considering the alternatives.

Read more about Kunz's plan [here](#).

The Apollo Alliance

A long-time advocate for green collar jobs in America, the Apollo Alliance describes itself as "a coalition of business, labor, environmental, and community leaders working to catalyze a clean energy revolution in America to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, cut the carbon emissions that are destabilizing our climate, and expand opportunities for American businesses and workers."

Transit plays a prominent role in the Alliance's 10-year, \$500 billion plan to create 5 million new jobs. Among their proposals: bringing government investment in mass transit at least up to par with investments in highways, increasing the government's share of funding for transit and infrastructure projects and prioritizing repair and maintenance of infrastructure over new highways.

In stating its case, the Apollo Alliance quotes James S. Simpson, the Federal Transit Administration Administrator:

"The "value proposition" for transit has never been greater. Ridership is at its highest level since late 1950s - with over 10 billion trips taken in the U.S. last year. Every \$1 invested in public transportation projects generates \$6 in local economic activity. And transit saves the nation almost 4 million gallons of gasoline a day and drastically reduces carbon dioxide emissions."

Read the Apollo Alliance's program [here](#). Read more about what they have to say about investment in mass transit [here](#) and [here](#).

Transportation for America

A nationwide coalition of organizations, [Transportation for America](#) is also calling for a revamped system of transportation in America, including federal help in retrofitting unsafe urban roads, complete streets for cars, cyclists and pedestrians, more local and democratic decision-making and using transport to create affordable housing and jobs (they are talking about over 20 million new jobs in building new infrastructure and repairing the old).

As proof that Americans support investments in better public transportation, the group points to [23 new transport-related initiatives](#), approved on Election Day, that will invest a total of \$75 billion in transit projects across the country, such as California's Proposition 1A high-speed rail project and LA's Measure R.

So how receptive will the new administration in Washington be to these kinds of ideas come January 20? Here is an excerpt of [a letter](#) the Obama campaign sent Transportation for America back in October:

"I support Amtrak funding and the development of high-speed freight and passenger rail networks across the country... I will also re-commit federal resources to public mass transportation projects across the country. I've worked to improve transportation access to jobs for people with lower incomes since my time in the Illinois State Senate, and I will continue this work as President. And I will further promote transit by creating incentives for transit usage that are equal to the current incentives for driving... Everyone benefits if we can leave our cars, walk, bicycle and access other transportation alternatives. I agree that we can stop wasteful spending and save Americans money, and as president, I will re-evaluate the transportation funding process to ensure that smart growth considerations are taken into account "

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