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Community-building: a constant effort

High-speed rail service is vital component of Fort Wayne's ongoing push toward greatness

Megan E. Butler

Megan E. Butler is a Fort Wayne resident and creator of Gray Matters, a political policy discussion group.

This letter is in response to Craig Ladwig's Jan. 6 piece ("Enthusiasm for ill-conceived project sending city off the rails").

As an interested citizen, I feel the need to respond to Ladwig's attempted take-down of the high-speed rail initiative being worked on by the city.

I will resist the urge to reiterate the points the city has already made regarding the many reasons to build rail and, instead, add my own.



His Indiana Policy Review is nothing more than a lobbyist-funded Post Office box that spews silliness and is connected to similar "policy reviews" around the country – propaganda machinery at its finest.

His "transportation expert" Randal O'Toole is a man hell-bent on destroying community building after an incident in 1995 where his neighborhood was going to be rezoned for denser development.

Most ludicrously, Ladwig intentionally misleads readers when he fails to address the costs of other forms of transportation.

Interstate highways cost \$15 million to \$20 million per mile. That's five times the cost of rail. Airports receive millions in grants and various subsidies. I do not oppose highways or air travel. Rather, I believe rail is an important part of a healthy transportation diet.

Finally, I am grateful for Ladwig's implied service to our country. And his fond memories of rail travel. But, if he chooses to live in the past rather than the present, his opinions on the future have little place in the discussion about what to actually do for the future.

Rail is absolutely our future.

I say this as, yes, a dreaded millennial. But, a millennial who loves my children, loves my neighbors and loves my city.

Just as I spend time reading to my sons every day to invest in their minds, I would like my leaders to invest in my community. That means investing in infrastructure. That means investing in high-speed rail.

Ladwig did not address any of Councilman Geoff Paddock's points ("Leaving the station – at last," Jan. 1) So, let me present some real numbers:

- Fort Wayne has more than 250,000 people. One ranking puts us as the 74th largest city in the U.S., and we are the second-largest in Indiana. And, we are within 500 miles of half of the US population. That's a lot of people in and near Fort Wayne.
- According to Visit Fort Wayne, each year we have more than 5.8 million visitors who spend more than \$550 million directly. Visitors love our city and will come in even larger numbers (with open pocketbooks) if we add rail.
- Northeast Indiana was a recipient of \$42 million in Regional Cities money. Investment is already happening at a breakneck pace. We do ourselves a disservice to pretend the future isn't already here. Ladwig can stick his head in the sand, but the rest of us don't need to.

Aside from raw data, there's this fact. All of the great cities in the world are great because good people stayed there and worked hard to make them great. Community-building is one of the biggest acts of faith in this life. We can work for years on a project to improve our community and have to have faith that it will pay off. Ladwig is clearly done investing and wishes to enjoy the fruits of his labor. I say let him. But he cannot stand in the way of those of us who wish to continue to work, to labor, to have faith and to build our community. For those of us who love Fort Wayne, it is clear that high-speed rail will move our community forward.