



Michael Sussman's Opening Remarks, Day 2, USA Rail 2009, Chicago, IL, September 11, 2009

For much of our past, railroads have been demonized, romanticized, or politicized. Railroads, however, remain one of the core elements of any modern, well-functioning society, as vital as clean water and power distribution. We must establish a more clear-eyed, and therefore productive, relationship to rail transportation.

In promoting the value of rail transportation, though, we cannot afford to pit highway, waterway, or railway transport modes against each other, either in public policy or the marketplace. Integration and coordination for maximum efficiency must now guide our planning and investment. That is why OnTrackAmerica is promoting a set of metrics for freight transportation as a whole—to accommodate an objective analysis of the comparative costs, impacts and contributions of the various transport modes. With this new platform, we can have a responsible discussion about trains and trucks, without automatically being considered partial to one mode or the other.

It is time for long-term thinking and action. Our attention to higher-volume shipping lanes and overall capacity does not have to mean less rural, urban, and direct rail service with its consequent increase in local truck traffic. Projects of “national significance” are important but so are the many smaller projects that contribute to a networked freight transportation system. We do have the most productive freight rail system in the world. But our society's tendency to pit groups against each other has led to a North American transportation system that underutilizes railroads in spite of this success. We need railroads more than ever, and, we need a growing, high-tech, freight rail system as a strong foundation for the build out of our passenger rail system.

Fortunately, freight railroads do not need a government bailout; they are currently outperforming other industries. That stability, along with rail technology's inherent energy and capital efficiency, can deliver a high return on investment if we focus our national economic revitalization plans on a comprehensive build-out of our entire rail transportation system. Truck and rail transportation both have their places within an efficient freight system. But we have abdicated the design of that interaction to the economic drivers of the marketplace. And the marketplace does not act holistically or sustainably.

As you may have heard from my remarks yesterday, at the heart of my work is the possibility of coordination transcending competition as our primary business and regulatory principle. But before I could establish my confidence in man's ability to collaborate and work in the best interests of the community I had to ponder, as many of us do, what is the true nature of man. Are we community-minded or are we self-minded?

Our American culture teaches us to strive for individual success as that is what is best for everyone because the authority on the subject Charles Darwin said that evolution depended on

it. The “Survival of the Fittest”, as in humans by nature are selfish, may have made more of an impression on our development as a society of business people than any other concept. So it occurred to me to read Origin of the Species to see what Darwin actually said, not what I have been told he said. And what I found was that Charles Darwin never uses the term “survival of the fittest.” Instead, he wrote that species, ecosystems, communities, and individuals organize themselves around the long term interests of the community and the next generation. In nature, the community provides the best perches, the best food, and the best resources to those amongst them that are strongest and therefore produce the healthiest offspring. He was inspired by the sacrifice and commitment of individuals to place their communities’ best interests before their own. Harmony with the community, not domination of the community is what he observed. Charles Darwin said that individuals in nature are inherently social and communal and that is what provides sustainability.

So how did we come to misapply what Darwin wrote in Origin of the Species? We remember that this was the mid-19th century when American industrialists desperately wanted a belief system to justify their accumulation of large amounts of control and cash in their hands, particularly relative to their brethren. So they sponsored members of a new intellectual field called Social Philosophy, Herbert Spencer among them, to promote a misreading of Origin of the Species and give their domination cover.

I will never forget what I discovered from my readings of Charles Darwin’s own writings outside of Origin of the Species. He relates that as he observed the complex interworkings of plants and animals, in tidepools and hatcheries, he was struck by the intricacy, beauty, and selflessness. He said that after all explanations are posed, one runs out of explanations for how it all could be so and he finds himself appreciating the presence of God.

Working collaboratively, we can move beyond incremental progress to place rail transportation at the dynamic center of a revitalized North American economy.

We continue an informative, dynamic conference with a top-notch panel on High-Speed Rail Transportation, moderated by Edzard Luebben. Edzard is Vice President of High Speed Rail for Siemens Mobility. Please welcome Edzard.

We are honored to have our next speaker, a man who brings tremendous credibility to the case for High Speed Rail Transportation, Judge Quentin Kopp.