

February 8, 2018

Session Title (preliminary):

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ADOPTING
THE FASTEST FORMS OF TRANSPORTATION TECHNOLOGY

SESSION ORGANIZER: Professor Jim Cohen, The City University of N.Y.

jcohen@jjay.cuny.edu

Various forms of proven, very high speed, transportation, which are arguably more advanced than existing technology, have either not been adopted; adopted and abandoned; or only adopted in limited circumstances. For example, frictionless, magnetically levitated “trains” (Maglev), and tracked air cushion vehicles--which run at distinctly higher speeds than existing steel-wheeled trains; operate with lower maintenance costs; and manifest superior sustainability--have been implemented in very few places, on a very limited scale (Japan, China, South Korea). Similarly, the Anglo-French Concorde is the only example of a commercial, supersonic, passenger aircraft, and it was abandoned years ago. Why haven’t these, or other highly advanced, very fast, transport technologies, been more widely adopted?

My recent research concerns the history of efforts to revive the passenger rail manufacturing industry in the U.S., particularly in the 1960’s and 1970’s, which included public-private initiatives to develop and commercialize both very high speed, steel wheeled trains and frictionless ground transport technology. My proposed paper for SHOT will explain how and why these efforts failed, in spite of the fact that the U.S. led the world in high speed manufacturing innovations from the 1930’s through the mid-1950’s. The result has been that, since the 1980’s, the U.S. has been dependent on European and Asian manufacturers and operators for very high speed transport technology.

I am looking for colleagues, working on related subject matter, to join a panel at SHOT. And/or colleagues may suggest additional examples, cases, or forms of technologically superior, very high speed transport technology, whose adoption, or lack thereof, they wish to explain.

These subjects are important for the history of technology field on both theoretical and practical grounds. They address why certain technological developments emerge, at particular historical moments, instead of others (cf. Dosi, Rosenberg, Hugill, and others); how and why firms and nations innovate; and how and why very high speed transport innovations could affect comparative advantage in international trade.

I will be in France for research and lectures, from March 17-28, so I would greatly appreciate it if proposals could be sent to me before March 17. However, per SHOT guidelines, I will review proposals submitted until March 24. Thank you.