

# The Egyptian Army, “Yes!” Amtrak, ??

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Recent dispatches from the Federal City on the Potomac indicate that the State Dept. -- notwithstanding some misgivings -- is going ahead with disbursement of another \$1.3 Billion to the Egyptian army. Meanwhile, some U. S. transportation needs go unmet, including those of increasingly-popular Amtrak service. Even worse, some funds already appropriated are held up by bureaucratic intransigence. An example being \$75 million of Obama administration rail improvement funds, “granted” to Virginia two years ago to construct 11 miles of third main track in the busy DC-Richmond corridor.

Known as the Arkendale-Cherry Hill 3<sup>rd</sup> track project, the illusive Federal Rail Administration grant has been held hostage to well-intentioned, but unrealistic, insistence on the part of FRA that CSX quantify, in advance, resulting service improvement standards and risk financial penalties if not subsequently achieved. Virginia’s Department of Rail -- representing public beneficiaries -- is understandably frustrated, and fearful of loss of funding if the FRA-CSX impasse is not soon resolved. We can’t help but wonder how tough the State Dept. was on the Egyptian generals?

Virginians are constantly asking why can’t we have more and better intercity rail passenger service? Why was the train late? Was the air conditioning not working? Why can’t we get more big trucks off the road and onto rail?

Google U. S. foreign aid distribution by countries, if you haven’t done so lately. You may be surprised how much goes to which country. For example, this week’s print news revealed that we’ve been giving \$140 million annually to Mali. Can you find Mali on a map? Moreover, billions of dollars – that’s with a capital “B” Billion – have been swallowed up by fraud and corruption in Iraq and Afghanistan. And we will never know how much is spent by the Department of Defense supporting U. S. troops around the world. Can you explain why it is necessary for the U. S. to protect one of our nation’s most effective trade competitors, South Korea?

It’s all about national priorities. One is reminded of the proverbial shoemaker, whose children had no shoes. South Korea has better passenger rail service than does the U. S. Ditto for Taiwan. If we can agree that all of the above requires a fresh look, then we must take a more active interest in who we send to Washington, and – difficult as it is -- try to hold them accountable once they get there.

Transportation -- all transportation -- is an essential ingredient in the economic success of any nation. Economic competitiveness depends to a great extent on transportation, including RAIL, both freight and passenger. As this is written, our elected representatives in D.C. are in the process of kicking the can down the road for

another three months with regard to “reauthorization” of the so-called “Highway Bill”.  
They will never do any better unless the voters insist upon it. Pretty clear, isn't it!

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