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high-speed train, a technology that was conceptualized nearly a century ago and has been in development since the 1930s. Only one commercial maglev train is operating in the world today, in Shanghai, connecting the city with its airport 19 miles away. It takes eight minutes to make the trip.

San Diego real estate developer Sandor Shapery is one of the proponents for some kind of use for maglev, perhaps down the center of Interstate 5. General Atomics is one of several companies exploring its feasibility.

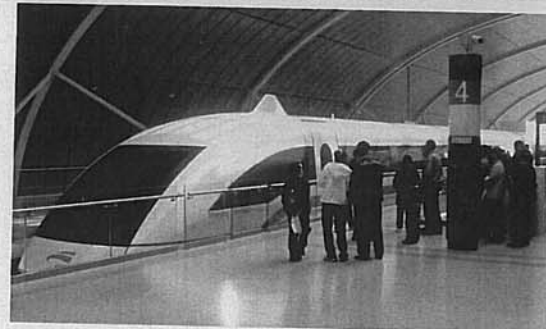
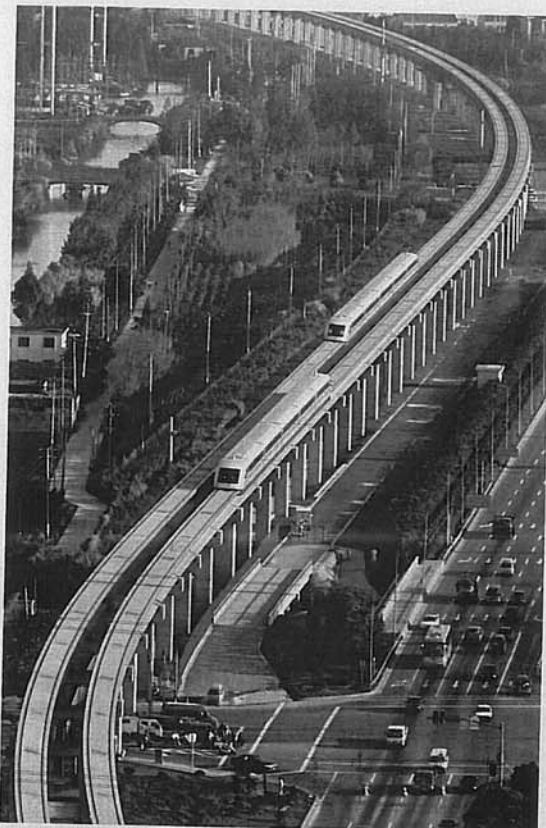
Maglev technology does cost more to build than other high-speed rail options. But Shapery says the operating-cost savings are so significant that a maglev train actually might be able to become a money-maker for mass transit. He's putting his money where his beliefs are—he's part of a group trying to get the maglev concept off the drawing board and into reality.

"Maglev's time has come, because there is no money left to subsidize rail," Shapery says. "It's the first system that will support itself in highly populated corridors like San Diego to Los Angeles. Even if you dropped ticket prices to \$20, our numbers show you could still break even and pay for building the system. Maglev has to come, because all these other options can't solve our major transportation problem. It's a way to get a lot of cars and trucks off the freeways."

(As with most public transportation in the nation, San Diego's bus, trolley and train passengers are getting subsidized service. Their fares pay for about 35 percent of the cost of their bus rides; as much as 60 percent of the cost of the trolley and Coaster rides. That fare-box recovery, as it's called, is better than the national average of less than 25 percent, transit officials say.)

FEW PEOPLE GET INTO THEIR CARS these days without first watching television or listening to radio to find out what's ahead for them on the road. And people are paying attention to mass transit when they need it. On February 15, an early-morning fatal accident on Interstate 5 forced the closure of all the southbound lanes for hours. The incident was the big news story of the morning. And that morning, all of the Coaster's 700-passenger trains were packed with standing-room-only crowds—crowds of commuters who made it to work on time while their car-bound brethren sat in traffic.

In the belief that "If you build it, they will ride," mass transit operators and planners say that continuing congestion and rising gasoline costs will do what no amount of marketing has been able to do—get commuters to at least try the trolley, the bus, the train. ■



Only one commercial maglev train, riding on a cushion of air, is operating in the world today. It connects the city of Shanghai with its airport 19 miles away.