

Viewpoints

Is this railroad plan for real?

Is the Grand Canyon railroad for real?

Apparently so, responds Robert Roth, president and chief executive officer of Grand Canyon Railway, the company that plans steam-engine train service between Williams and the south rim of the canyon by April 1990.

The company has purchased all track and rights-of-way from Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Co., which ran a train to the canyon for years before shutting it down in 1968 due to low ridership.

Next summer, the firm will replace 30,000 cross ties as well as a number of bridges along the 64-mile route the parallels Arizona 64 to Tusayan.

There are plans for motels in Williams and Tusayan, a rail spur to Grand Canyon Airport and a western theme park in Williams.

The railroad cars are purchased and are being stored at an undisclosed location, according to Roth, and the railroad station at the canyon, just a few hundred feet from the rim, is due to be refurbished.

The whole plan sounds good.

How will the railroad affect the local economy? Quite favorably, in all likelihood.

There's a fascination for trains and Colorado's famed Durango-Silverton

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run draws thousands of tourists to the Rocky Mountain narrow gauge line every year.

Will there be enough interest — at \$35 a ticket — to keep the railroad running? That's an unknown on which Roth and his partners are gambling.

Millions of tourists visit the canyon every year. Many can afford the additional expense of a train ticket.

There's also good news on the environmental front. Because the train provides the potential for canyon visitors to leave their cars in a parking lot in Williams, there should be less traffic, less car exhaust and more parking spaces in the national park.

Perhaps the best news of all was the magic phrase "the money's in the bank."

Several entrepreneurs have announced plans to revive the Grand Canyon railroad. They've died quiet deaths.

The latest Grand Canyon Railway proposal sounds like the most solid plan yet.

That's good news for train buffs all over the world as well as residents who stand to gain economically with a successful project.