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Letters

Driving subsidy as social overhead

Charles Komanoff ("Tallying traffic's hidden costs," SN: 3/6/93, p.159) calls transportation subsidies "equivalent to \$3,000 taken forcibly and unawares every year out of the pockets of each man, woman, and child in the New York metropolitan area." Such rhetoric not only serves to undermine the veracity of his argument, it flies in the face of the respected economic principle of social overhead capital: the investment of public funds to further the public good.

What kind of cost-benefit analysis is it that presents only the costs and overlooks the benefits of public investment in transportation networks? I know of no serious transportation economist who argues that highway infrastructure should be self-supporting.

H. Paul Shuch
Professor of Electronics
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Williamsport, Pa.

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Cover: Offspring of albino mice regained their brown coloring because of an exciting new technique for transferring large genes into germlines. (Photo: Günther Schütz/German Cancer Research Center)



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The primary flaw in the report is the lack of an equivalent computation of the "hidden" benefits of the current system or the costs of the alternative. The benefits include the contributions made to the U.S. economy by associated jobs in auto manufacturing, petroleum production, service stations, auto repair, and road construction, plus the myriad industries that supply them. The proposed \$14,000 tax per large truck, which would necessarily be passed directly to consumers, including those who don't possess a car, is a large cost.

The authors' arguments may have merit, but the lack of objectivity raises doubts about the correctness of their conclusions.

C. Patrick Ervin
Sycamore, Ill.

Giving credit where it's due

"Fire Beneath the Ice" (SN: 2/13/93, p.104) did not mention the contributions to the CASERTZ (Corridor Aerogeophysics of the Southeast Ross Transect Zone) project made by Steve

Hodge, John Behrendt, and Carol Finn of the U.S. Geological Survey and John Brozena of the Naval Research Laboratory. These investigators, coauthors on the NATURE paper, played significant roles in developing the airborne platform used in the program, as well as in reducing the data that point to active volcanism beneath the West Antarctic ice sheet.

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