

Opinion: Ski train idea worth pursuing

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Every weekend in the winter, thousands of skiers make the long drive up Interstate 80 to visit resorts near Soda Springs, Truckee and Tahoe.

Many of them undoubtedly notice the train tracks that parallel the interstate and wonder, "Wouldn't it be nice if I could take a train to the slopes?"

That's not practical now because of Amtrak's schedules, but moves are afoot to make a ski train a reality in future years. As The Bee's Ed Fletcher noted recently, the new CEO of Squaw Valley, Andy Wirth, has been talking to managers of other resorts about a ski train from the Bay Area to Truckee. He deserves credit for giving new life to an old idea. But make no mistake, the obstacles are formidable.

The biggest is the Sierra's mountainous terrain and steep grades that slow travel times. It can take five hours to get to the slopes by train from Sacramento, seven hours from the Bay Area. The only way to make a ski train work is to make rail improvements that speed travel times. Choke points have to be identified and eliminated.

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