



A \$260.91 Drive From Miami

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Lore Croghan, a Daily News reporter, flew down to Miami recently to pick her daughter, Antonia, up from college. The two [drove back to the city](#) in a VW New Beetle. The 1,323-mile road trip cost them \$260.91, including lodging and meals. Lore also had to fly down to Miami, which cost another \$124, for a total of \$384.91.

With a few days notice, Amtrak tickets for two from Miami cost \$212 or \$274 aboard [the Silver Star or the Silver Meteor](#). You still need to factor in meals aboard Amtrak, which will raise that ticket price a bit. But the two prices seem roughly comparable for a party of two. But are they really?

The price breakdown ignores [the fixed costs](#) of owning a car (depreciation, vehicle maintenance, insurance, parking, etc.), and the related \$124 that that Lore had to spend on her flight. Half of the purpose of the trip, after all, was to retrieve the car as well as the daughter. (Once you buy a car, you have to keep track of it.)

Of course, the increasing cost of energy is affecting rail travel as well as commercial aviation and private automobile use, but it is affecting rail a lot less than the other two. So as the price continues to increase, as we Peak Oilers expect it will, there will come a point where rail travel is unequivocally less expensive than driving. When that happens, I think we can expect "the markets" to start directing some money to the long-underinvested rail system.

Ignoring the fixed costs and overhead of owning a car, even on a per-trip basis for an individual, the economics are beginning to favor rail. A single adult ticket one way from Miami to New York costs \$106 or \$137 on Amtrak, half the price of two riders. Would one person driving along cost exactly half the price of two people? No. The cost of gasoline would be exactly the same. That is why it always makes sense to pack the car up with people and split the cost. We New Yorkers grapple with this question every time we're in a group trying to decide whether it makes sense to take a cab or the subway: The more people you have to fill up a cab, the cheaper the cost is per rider.

So what do you think will happen in the future as energy costs increase. Will we restore our national rail system, or will we increase the occupancy of automobiles, [Cuba-style](#)?



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