

Pre-publication draft for submission to third-party artificial intelligence (AI) for facts-evidence-analysis (FEA) check for a developing report on MHProNews.

Dirty Secrets in Housing Crisis. Lessons from "Purple Haze" and the First Transcontinental Railroad for the Puzzled, Concerned or Angry About U.S. Affordable Housing Crisis. MHVille FEA

This article will use historic and contemporary facts and insights to shed light on some of the dirty secrets about the affordable housing crisis. First the background, then the pivot to affordable housing. In a post entitled "Purple Haze," according to [The Century Foundation on 8.12.2013](#): "A Question of **Price**. At **current estimates**, building the **Purple Line** will **cost** \$25,000 for every foot of track, or \$132 million per mile." Per [GAIO](#): "The Maryland Purple Line, a 16.2-mile light-rail project from Bethesda to New Carrollton, was originally slated for completion in 2022 with a total project cost of approximately **\$5.6 billion**. It is now expected to open in **December 2027** with a total budget that has ballooned to over **\$9.7 billion**, with construction costs alone rising by more than \$1.4 billion due to disputes and delays. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)]"

1. Also per [GAIO](#).

AI Overview

Original Estimates vs. Actuals (approximate):

- **Original Timeline:** Groundbreaking in 2017 with service starting in 2022.
- **Revised Timeline:** Anticipated completion now set for 2027.
- **Original Cost:** ~\$5.6 billion (total 36-year contract, including design, construction, operation, and maintenance).
- **Revised Cost:** ~\$9.7 billion (total 30-year contract following restructuring). [[1](#), [2](#)]

2. Compare the Purple Line to the first Transcontinental Railroad. [According to GAIO](#), which cited its sources as shown.

AI Overview

The main line was the **First Transcontinental Railroad** (originally the Pacific Railroad), a 1,911-mile track connecting Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Oakland, California, completed on May 10, 1869. Built between 1863 and 1869, this massive project was constructed by the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads, joining at Promontory Summit, Utah. [1, 2]

Key Details

- - **Timeframe:** Construction began in 1863, with the final spike driven on May 10, 1869.
 - **The Route:** It linked the existing eastern U.S. rail network at Council Bluffs, Iowa, to the Pacific Coast, transforming a six-month trip into a two-week journey.
 - **Construction Companies:**
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 - **Central Pacific Railroad:** Built 690 miles eastward from Sacramento, California.
 - **Union Pacific Railroad:** Built 1,085 miles westward from Omaha, Nebraska.
 - **Costs:**
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 - **Financial Cost:** It cost roughly $\$45,000$ to $\$60,000$ per mile to build, with total costs often estimated around $\$1.2$ billion in modern dollars.
 - **Federal Subsidy:** The government funded the project with bonds of $\$16,000$ to $\$48,000$ per mile depending on terrain.
 - **Human Cost:** The project relied on thousands of Chinese immigrants (for the Central Pacific) and Irish laborers (for the Union Pacific), who worked under dangerous, often fatal conditions. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

This project was authorized by the [Pacific Railroad Act of 1862](#) to unify the country. [1]

3. Let's look again at the following per [GAIO about the Maryland Purple Line](#).

◆ AI Overview

The primary enabling authority for the Maryland Purple Line is the [Fixing America's Surface Transportation \(FAST\) Act](#), signed into federal law in **December 2015**, which enabled the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to award major capital investment funds. The state commitment was solidified in **March 2013** when the Maryland General Assembly passed a transportation funding bill to finance it. [1, 2]

Regarding actual spending on the project:

- **Total Spent (As of Nov 2025):** Approximately **\(\$2.171\)** billion has been expended on the design-build contract since the new contract was signed on April 15, 2022, according to the [Purple Line Construction Status 2025 JCR report](#).
- **Previous Spent (Before 2020):** Before the original contractor withdrew in 2020, the project had already consumed **\(\$1.1\)** billion.
- **Total Project Cost:** The total project cost, including construction and financing over 36 years, is now estimated to be approaching **\(\$10\)** billion. [1, 2, 3, 4]

The project is now scheduled to open in late 2027. [1]

- So, for the first Transcontinental Railroad that 1,911-miles of track were completed about 7 years after the legislation was passed.
- By comparison, 13 years since Maryland's state assembly and 11 years since the federal "FAST" act was passed, the Maryland Purple Line "16.2-mile light-rail project from Bethesda to New Carrollton" is not yet completed.
- The first Transcontinental Railroad cost \$1,200,000,000/1911 miles = or about \$627,943.485 per mile.
- By comparison, Maryland's Purple Line has reportedly cost some \$3,271,000,000/16.2 miles=\$201,913,580.247 per mile.

That translates into **321.547377 more per mile** in the 'modern' era for Maryland's Purple Line than it was for the First Transcontinental Railroad.

4. Restated, there is an evidence-based argument to be made that 'modern' regulations and/or corruption have caused spending to surge and timelines to wildly decline, well beyond the 'rate of inflation.'

5. There are many possible examples to further illustrate the concern. But let's use one before pivoting to housing, let's look at one more example that sheds a very different kind of light on costs.

According to [GAIO](#).

AI Overview

In the 1960s and early 1970s, a 13-inch or similar small-screen portable black-and-white [Admiral TV](#) would typically cost roughly **\$100 to over \$150** (roughly \$800–\$1,200+ in 2026 dollars). [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

Today, a 50-inch 4K smart TV—which offers vastly superior technology—is available for roughly **\$180 to \$350** in 2026. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

Historical Cost Breakdown (1960s-1970s)

- **Price:** While prices varied based on the model and year, small Admiral black-and-white sets were often marketed as affordable, with some listed in the \$100–\$175 range.
- **Inflation Impact:** A \$100-\$150 television in the mid-1960s is equivalent to over \$1,000 in today's purchasing power, making it a significant household investment.
- **Console Alternatives:** Larger color console TVs in the same period often cost \$400 to over \$600 (roughly \$3,000–\$5,000 in 2026 dollars). [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

Current Cost Breakdown (2026)

- **Budget 50-Inch:** Entry-level 50-inch 4K LED TVs are currently available, such as the Insignia 50" Class F50 Series LED 4K UHD Smart Fire TV for \$179.99 at Best Buy.
- **Mid-Range 50-Inch:** Quality 50-inch options from major brands often cost around \$300, such as the Samsung 50" Class Crystal UHD U8000H 4K Smart TV at Best Buy for \$299.99.
- **Premium 50-Inch:** High-performance models like the Samsung QN90F, as reviewed by ZDNET, can run closer to \$885. [[1](#), [2](#), [5](#)]

Despite inflation, the nominal price of a 50-inch screen today is often lower than a 13-inch black-and-white screen in the 1960s. [1]

6. MHPProNews recently published a somewhat related report. See that linked below. It illustrated that housing adjusting wages and housing costs for inflation, was less costly in the 1950s. As the above just illustrated, television sets have *declined* in price while increasing in size and quality, while housing increased in costs.

[caption id="" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



Comparing U.S. Cost of Living in 1950s to 2026. Snapshots of Income-Housing-Costs in 1950s vs. 2026. Baseline References for Conventional Housing-Mobile Homes-Manufactured Homes. MHVille FEA

<https://www.manufacturedhomepronews.com/comparing-u-s-cost-of-living-in-1950s-to-2026-snapshots-of-income-housing-costs-in-1950s-vs-2026-baseline-references-for-conventional-housing-mobile-homes-manufactured-homes-mhville-fea/>[/caption]

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