

School of  
Architecture  
and Planning

Massachusetts  
Institute  
of Technology

Department of  
Urban Studies  
and Planning

77 Massachusetts  
Avenue  
Room 10-485

Cambridge  
Massachusetts  
02139

Telephone:(617) 253-7323  
Fax: (617) 258-8081  
E-mail: jonmark@mit.edu

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Señor Jordi Bonet i Armengol  
Reina Victoria 16  
08021 Barcelona  
SPAIN

Dear Señor Bonet:

I am writing to you as the architect responsible for the ongoing construction of Sagrada Familia. I was distressed to learn recently that the foundations of Sagrada Familia may be endangered by the construction of a tunnel under calle Mallorca intended for the use of the high-speed AVE trains. This appears to me to be a clear instance of the narrow, shortsighted engineering mindset, which only considers engineering challenges to be worthy of discussion and ignores questions of greater value to society.

The fact that the Spanish government chose to nominate Sagrada Familia and the corpus of work by Antoni Gaudi as a World Heritage site and that UNESCO has honored these works with this designation attests to their cultural importance, not only to Catalunya and to Spain, but also to humankind. Once a site is designated as a World Heritage site, we all have the responsibility to assure that that site is cared for and protected for posterity.

The construction of the AVE tunnel appears to me to be an abrogation of that trust. It is surely inevitable that the construction of such a tunnel and the vibrations of passing trains will eventually weaken the foundations of Sagrada Familia itself, endangering the ongoing work to realize this monument to Catalan architecture and to the work of Antoni Gaudi.

Sagrada Familia is already a monument to the Catalan spirit; it should remain so for centuries to come. The life of a mundane railroad tunnel is measured in decades, not in millennia. Transportation infrastructure will change as technology changes; the tunnel will slowly degrade, and one day it will have outlasted its usefulness. The importance of Sagrada Familia to the human spirit will only grow.

In the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at M.I.T. we have come to realize that one needs to delineate carefully the roles and responsibilities of engineers in building livable cities. Engineering standards that cater to trucks rather than people

have blighted our cities, and engineers' claims that every construction problem has a technical solution have begun to lose their persuasiveness. You may have heard that in Boston the construction of the Big Dig, the largest civil engineering project in the history of the world, has left us with a legacy of leaking and collapsing tunnels with serious safety concerns despite the assurances of its designers. Throughout this project the engineers reassured us that everything would be taken care of, that preexisting buildings would be protected, and that the tunnels would be safe. Tragically, a woman died just last week because of engineering and construction mistakes when a series of roof panels that were improperly designed and/or installed fell crushing her car. Sometimes a technical answer is not enough, and we should be wary of erring too far in that direction. We cannot stop building tunnels, but we should think carefully before going ahead when there are viable options, as there appear to be in this case.

If the current plan proceeds, the fact that Sagrada Familia has been listed as a World Heritage site will have meant nothing at all. To consciously endanger a World Heritage site is an act of thoughtless vandalism. Is that the kind of society in which we want to live? My answer is "no," and I know that that is your answer as well.

Please add my voice to the voices of those who have expressed the hope that an alternative solution will be adopted for the routing of this train tunnel, and please let me know if there is anything else that I can do to help stop this ill-advised plan.

Yours truly,

J. Mark Schuster  
Professor of Urban Cultural Policy  
Joint Editor, *Journal of Cultural Economics*  
Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
77 Massachusetts Ave.  
10-485  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
USA