The West at its best

The future of train travel?

We may not get a high-speed train that runs the 2-hour, 40-minute route from L.A. to San Francisco until 2020, but it's fun to imagine what that experience could be like. In our dream world, each High Speed Rail (HSR) car would be customized for a particular kind of traveler. Take the foodie car, where a slate of Western chefs and winemakers would expose passengers to wines, beers, and foods in the areas the train passes through. Sure beats a can of Pringles.

SMART WINDOWS
Each car window's scrolling "captions" let passengers learn more about where they are.

VITAMIN C Citrus trees flourish courtesy of solar-powered grow lights. Pick fruit and eat it straight or have it juiced.

LOCAL WINES ON TAP
Taste Western Pinots and Chards with a guest winemaker. Flights also available.

SOLAR PANELS
A great way to cut down on the electricity bill for the espresso machine.

HYDRAULIC TABLES
With the push of a button, cocktail tables elevate from their subfloor hideaway.

SELF-HARVEST SALAD
SNIP Snip and dress your own organic greens from a hydroponic vertical garden and choice of on-tap vinaigrettes.

MORE FANTASY CARS

Adventurer car
Lined with storage lockers and hooks to hang equipment like bikes, kayaks, and surfboards, the car would also have an interactive wall-size map of bike routes and surf conditions around the West, updated in real time. Get tune-ups and repairs at the REI kiosk.

Ultra-wired car
This would have outlets, Wi-Fi, print stations working from Bluetooth, cell phone chargers for the forgetful, and a vending machine stuffed with office supplies, all within a soundproof room. Plus, an Apple Store Genius Bar alongside whiteboard walls for brainstorming.

Pet car
It's nearly impossible to fly with any dog that's larger than a handbag. That stops with HSR, where not only would there be a car dedicated to dog owners and their pets, but also a grooming station—something you never seem to be able to make time for at home without ruining a Saturday.

REALITY CHECK
How likely is it that we'll see HSR in the next decade? Well, California received one of the largest HSR grants from the federal government ($2.3 billion), and the Golden Triangle—which includes Arizona, California, and Nevada—was awarded $500,000 in study money.

SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION