

Re: Measure of Metal Supply Finds Future Shortage

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- *From:* Monte Davis <monte.davis@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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"Shawn Wilson" <ikonoqlast@xxxxxxx> wrote:

>If a 100 fold decrease in prices were possible it would already have
>happened.

This is a little too close to the old saw: "What does an economist do when he sees a \$100 bill on the sidewalk? He ignores it, because if it were real the market would already have picked it up."

There's a large, more realistic middle ground between Jeff's "Why would new technology be needed to lower the cost?" and the other extreme of "it simply can't be made much cheaper." I would summarize it as

1) There **are** non-fantasy technologies that could bring down costs significantly. But we've picked the low-hanging fruit; most of the promising innovations that we **know** are possible will take time and be expensive to develop and implement, and all of those we believe **might** be possible will take longer and cost more.

2) Building and flying a lot more could bring down costs of existing technology significantly -- **if** there's a large unserved market out there, and **if** there's a positive price/demand elasticity so that lower costs lead to enough additional traffic to more than pay for reaching them. Both are unknowns; it will take time and be expensive to verify that they're true (and **really** expensive to find out that they're false).

3) The public vs. private, NASA/BoLockMart vs. alt.space wrangles that take up so much energy are largely irrelevant to the points above, and have more to do with ideology -- and frustration at the perceived slow pace -- than with technology or economics.

Yes, NASA and its major contractors carry a lot of costly baggage traceable to politics and the sociology of large organizations, as well as to the glorious, money's-no-object days of the ICBM race and the space race. Yes, the lean mean entrepreneurial alt.space teams are over-hyped, and have a long way to go before they're important

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technological or economic players.

But the differences between them are not really that great, compared to the time and money needed to get from where we are to the Promised Land of cheap, robust, frequent access to space... *whoever* does it, with public *or* private investment, and *whatever* the mix of "design smarter" and "fly more."

This POV isn't very popular, because we all want space and want it *soon*. One wing of the space cadets says "If you don't agree that my silver techno-bullet will open the solar system, you have no vision and must be a blinkered space-hater," while the other says "If you don't agree that Burt Rutan and Elon Musk will be waiting by the helium-3 tank farm at Luna City to meet the first landing from VSE, you have no vision and must be one of those useless, tax-sucking Big Government/Big Aerospace drones."

Me, I'd like to see fewer visions and more recognition that it's possible for space to be at the same time exciting, inspirational, vital to our future as a species, eventually vastly profitable -- *and* a long, difficult, expensive slog that's unlikely ever again to deliver the fast-paced thrills of the 1960s.

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