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America needs to remain bullish on high-speed rail

As a nation, we have lost sight of why we need high-speed rail. We are viewing high-speed rail as an isolated, discreet and expensive product when we should be looking at it as a critical element of a balanced, efficient multi-modal transportation system.

Opponents cite a number of points against a high-speed rail system that are valid and worthy of investigation, for example:

- Can high-speed rail be built and operated without subsidies? Some believe that high-speed rail will not be self-sustaining and therefore, we should not invest in it. Even if this is true, should that be the yardstick for measuring the value and success of a vital component in our multi-modal transportation system? Our highway, maritime and aviation systems are not self-sustaining but they are extremely valuable in helping the U.S. achieve its transportation goals.
- Will high-speed rail create jobs? We know from experience that the construction of big infrastructure projects creates new jobs. Unfortunately, there has been virtually no federal investment in passenger rail projects for the past 50 years (outside of the Northeast Corridor) and, as a result, we are behind the curve in project readiness and development. We have some catching up to do to adequately engineer and design these projects before they can be constructed but, once high-speed rail projects begin construction and operation, we will hit the benchmark for job creation.

- Can we afford high-speed rail? There is opposition to raising taxes to pay for transportation infrastructure, including high-speed rail. In these difficult times, we need to prioritize high-speed rail so that if gasoline prices go even higher and airline fares rise in response, the traveling public will have somewhere to turn for those 200 to 600 mile trips.

The goal is to balance our transportation system

To achieve our goal we must plug high-speed rail into the big picture: High-speed rail is a key, and currently lacking, component of a U.S. transportation system.

- High-speed rail is the missing link that will connect our cities, airports and local transit systems, relieving some of the burden from our congested highways, airports and airways and helping them operate more efficiently.
- High-speed rail is a transformational investment that will deliver an extraordinary travel experience while also delivering greater mobility and short- and long-term economic benefits for the next 100 years similar to that of the Interstate Highway system.
- And, with every mile of track we build, we will see the benefits, including the birth of a new industry to manufacture rail cars and equipment, and an influx of transit-oriented development around stations that boost local economies and enhance quality of life.

The demise of high-speed rail has been greatly exaggerated!

Recent headlines would have us believe high-speed rail is dead, but it is not. True, three states (Ohio, Wisconsin and Florida) returned federal high-speed rail monies. And, Congress eliminated \$1 billion appropriated in 2011 high-speed rail funding and rescinded \$400 million of 2010 unallocated monies. But over 30 states with an almost equal mix of Republican and Democratic governors and 13 different programs applied and received federal high-speed and intercity passenger rail money and are working on their pieces of a national passenger rail program. And, though the funding cuts are a setback to the overall program, they are not devastating, nor do they signal the end of high-speed rail in America.

Most recently, twenty-four states, the District of Columbia and Amtrak submitted nearly 100 applications for the \$2 billion in high-speed rail monies that Florida declined. On May 9, the U.S. Department of Transportation redistributed those dollars to 15 states and Amtrak with a concentration of awards in the Northeast Corridor, the Midwest and California. As a result, major programs are moving forward, with the first leg of California's program going into procurement late this year.

Let us not forget the Obama Administration is expected to be a strong advocate for continued funding of high-speed rail in the fiscal year 2012 congressional budget negotiations. The challenge will be for all parties to agree on additional revenue for transportation programs, not just high-speed rail, to create a balanced, multi-modal system for America.

Money is being invested. Most states are clamoring for more. Projects are in the works across the country. That doesn't read like an obituary for high-speed rail. It reads like a birth announcement.

Hit the reset button

America needs to regain its bullishness on high-speed rail not for the good of the mode itself but for the good and future of our transportation system which in turn is good for America. High-speed rail is a transformational investment that will deliver greater mobility and short- and long-term economic benefits for the next 100 years!

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