



President Obama Unveils Rail Vision

“There are those who say this investment is too small. But this is just a first step. We know that this is going to be a long-term project.”

—Pres. Barack Obama

At an April 16 news conference, the President—joined by Vice-President Joe Biden and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood—unveiled DOT’s strategic plan, *Vision for High-Speed Rail in America*.

The President said “we need a smart transportation system equal to the needs of the 21st century...a system that reduces congestion...we need high speed rail...It is happening right now. It’s been happening for decades. The problem is it’s been happening elsewhere, not here...”

“Between Madrid and Seville...more people travel by rail than by car and airplane combined...China, where service began just two years ago, may have more miles of high-speed rail service than any other country just five years from now...”



—Scott Bernstein, www.cnt.org

President Barack Obama, flanked by Vice President Joe Biden (l.) and DOT Secretary Ray LaHood, presents his Administration’s vision for the growth and development of high speed rail, April 16, Washington, DC.

“There’s no reason why we can’t do this...Building a new system of high-speed rail in America will be faster, cheaper and easier than building more freeways or adding to an already overburdened aviation system—and everybody stands to

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National Train Day

The second annual Train Day will be celebrated May 9 at stations across the country (May 2 at Toledo). Amtrak is hosting events at Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Advocates across the nation are hosting events at other cities. A full list is at www.nationaltrainday.com

This newsletter will be given to National Train Day attendees. **If this is your first time reading NARP News, thank you!** The hand-out version has our membership application on page 4; benefits of membership are listed at www.narprail.org, click on “Join NARP” and, on the frame that comes up, on the “benefits” line at bottom.

Join NARP today and become part of our movement to create a modern, customer-focused national passenger train system that provides a travel choice Americans want! Thanks for your support.

Olver’s High Speed Rail Hearing: How Fast on Which Tracks?

“The Future of High Speed Rail, Intercity Passenger Rail, and Amtrak” was the subject of an April 1 hearing led by Rep. John Olver (D-MA), who chairs the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

This was Tom Latham’s (R-IA) first hearing as the subcommittee’s ranking member. He seemed upbeat, saying “in the last nine months we [the feds] spent or obligated about \$5.3 trillion, and we would have been better off spending a trillion of that on high-speed rail.”

The Government Accountability Office (GAO)—represented by Susan Fleming, one of GAO’s seven Directors of Physical Infrastructure Issues—seemed more

positive than previously, noting that “the potential benefits of high speed rail—both to riders and nonriders—are many.”

Fleming urged creating metrics and analytical tools to put rail investment on a level playing field with other modes.

Ohio: A Positive, New Beginning

Jolene M. Molitoris, Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation and President Clinton’s Federal Railroad Administrator, said, “Ohio has been studying how to restore passenger rail between its three largest cities since 1974, just three years after service...ceased.”

She said Gov. Ted Strickland (D) “in his 2009 State of the State address...announced his commitment to restoring passenger rail service to the 3-C Corri-

dor,” and Ohio’s General Assembly “approved the 2010-2011 State Transportation Budget encouraging the state to seek stimulus funds for passenger rail...”

“Ohio’s 3-C Corridor passenger rail service can be in operation quickly on existing infrastructure at conventional speeds. Recent history demonstrates that successful high-speed passenger rail projects have their foundation in a robust, incremental development of rail infrastructure and improvements starting from conventional speed service.”

On the freight side, she noted that, “as part of the state’s \$774 million transportation stimulus investment, \$68.9 million is being directed to 22 separate railroad

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Key Amtrak Hires: Gardner, Stadtler, Kulm

Stephen J. Gardner is Amtrak's new Vice President, Policy and Development, D.J. Stadtler is Chief Financial Officer, and Steve Kulm is Director of Media Relations.

Amtrak said Gardner will "oversee the railroad's general development and planning activities as Amtrak pursues growth and improvement through new business opportunities and partnerships."

He began work April 13. He had served with great distinction on the Democratic professional staff of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, where he played a major role in crafting the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act that became law in October. He now will have major responsibilities in seeing that Amtrak lives up to that law.

Gardner previously worked for Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and former Rep. Bob Clement (D-TN). He was an Amtrak management intern straight out of high school, later attending Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. During summer breaks, he was a trackworker for the Buckingham Branch Railroad in western Virginia. After graduating, he worked for Guilford as a conductor in Maine and a dispatcher in Boston.

"Here is a man who has melded his wonky policy obsession with railroads to electronic music, created a successful band based upon it, and then named that band Chessie in honor of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway...After [Guilford], Gardner headed...to Germany to spawn a little in the Berlin electronic music scene. He took trains all over Europe and returned home to Washington with rail betterment on his mind" (*Politico*, Sept. 18, 2008).

Gardner succeeds Anne Witt, who resigned effective April 10. Her real estate duties were shifted to Finance, on-time performance oversight to Operations.

Stadtler was at the Federal Railroad Administration, and has over 20 years' experience in federal financial management. He told Amtrak Ink, the employee magazine, "While working for the FRA, I saw Amtrak from the federal side. That focus gives me a real understanding of the types of reports and data the government wants from the company..."

Kulm succeeds—and reports to—Cliff Black, who was promoted 18 months ago to Chief, Corporate Communications. For the past five years, Kulm has been the Federal Railroad Administration's Director of Public Affairs. Before that, he was at Illinois DOT. ■

Obama Appoints FRA, FTA Administrators

President Obama nominated Joe Szabo to be Federal Railroad Administrator and Peter Rogoff as Federal Transit Administrator.

Szabo is Illinois State Legislative Director for the United Transportation Union. He played a key role in the 2006 expansion of Amtrak service in Illinois.

Rogoff worked 22 years for the Senate Appropriations Committee, the last 14 as Democratic staff director of its Transportation subcommittee. His knowledge, intelligence and hard work helped keep Amtrak alive during some of the toughest budget fights.

The President appointed Karen Rae Deputy Federal Railroad Administrator. Rae has had rail and transit responsibilities in state transportation departments in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York.

Rae also is Acting Administrator, pending Szabo's confirmation, for which an April 21 (2:30 PM) Senate hearing was scheduled.

Trenton's Beautiful Transit Center Takes Shape



—Photo: David Johnson

The Trenton, NJ, train station, now Trenton Transit Center, is getting the final touches of a \$79 million renovation. Amtrak, New Jersey Transit commuter trains and buses, and SEPTA share the facility and NJT's diesel light rail line, the RiverLine, is just across the street. What was one of Amtrak's most cramped and unsightly stations is well on its way to becoming a gem.

Another Pro-Train Poll

A poll commissioned by HNTB Corporation (a major infrastructure construction firm) found that 54% of Americans would "choose modern high-speed trains over automobiles and air travel if fares and travel time were about the same."

Americans are most excited by the fact that high speed trains could bring more convenient travel (71%), less expensive fares (69%) and faster trains (55%).

Exposure to high speed rail—Amtrak's *Acela* or abroad—dramatically increased preference for trains over other travel, with 82% of such respondents saying they found it more enjoyable than planes, and 51% saying they found themselves more productive when travelling on trains than on planes.

More public opinion polls can be found at www.narprail.org/polls

Georgia: Stuck in Neutral (or Reverse)

Struggles to bring modern rail service to Georgia continue, with problems on at least three fronts.

MARTA, Atlanta's bus and rail transit agency, might have to eliminate all service one day a week and raise fares from July 1 to close a budget gap.

Sales taxes in MARTA's service area, on which MARTA depends, have fallen dramatically due to the recession. MARTA sought approval from Georgia's General Assembly to ease restrictions on MARTA's capital reserve fund—also derived from the sales tax—to help close the gap, but the General Assembly adjourned this year without acting.

However, "the Atlanta Regional Commission's Transportation & Air Quality Committee voted April 9 to seek up to \$25 million from the feds to keep MARTA fully operating through the end of June 2010" (*Atlanta Business Chronicle*, April 9).

An Atlanta-Griffin commuter rail line has never started, despite years of studies and promises. As a result the \$87 million in federal funds set aside for the project in 1999 could be recalled by the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee "to ensure the effective use of highway and transit funds."

There was hope the General Assembly would designate a source of operations funding, but the Assembly failed to act after the Governor's budget proposal excluded it despite his 2008 public commitment to support funding for the line.

A troubling situation came to light in Atlanta's news media in January

Appropriations

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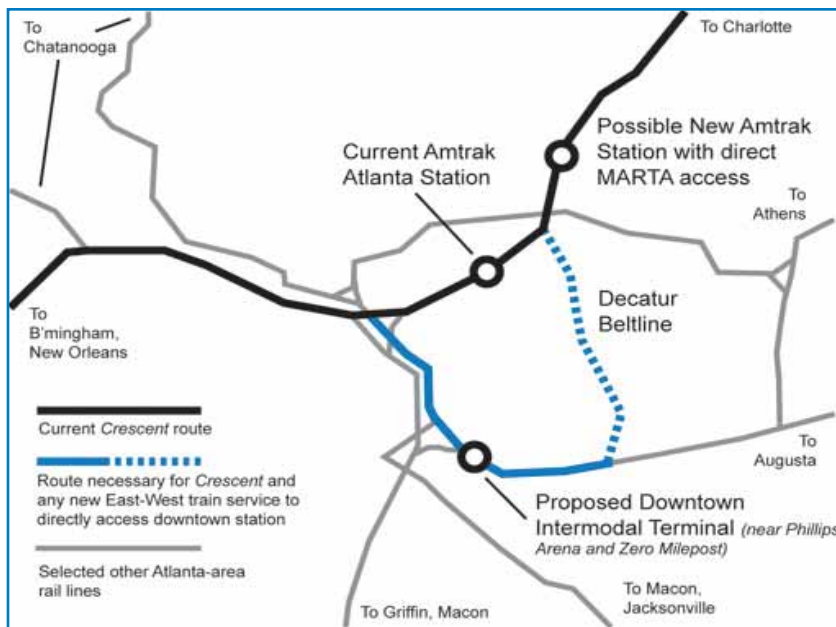
projects [and] the state will invest an additional \$50.9 million in federal transportation stimulus funds to support improved intermodal connections..."

Mode-specific "Silos" a Problem

Witnesses and legislators agreed that the current separation of planning for different modes of travel was creating a fragmented, inefficient transportation system, and made it hard to develop a clear set of national priorities.

Higher Speed Rail; "True" HSR

BNSF President and CEO Matthew Rose, who was on the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission (March 2008 *News*), said "the Commission clearly called for... investment needed to support passenger trains...at the highest speeds in sealed,



—Map: David Johnson

that pitted local environmentalists against passenger train advocates. (Georgia ARP remained officially neutral to minimize bad blood among erstwhile allies.)

The argument involved tracks originally built to link Atlanta's railroads and serve industry (dashed blue line on map). The proposed Beltline would use those tracks as part of an ambitious plan to encircle Atlanta with greenspace and transit.

However, the same tracks could have allowed passenger trains to run between Charlotte, a proposed downtown, intermodal Atlanta station, and points south and west (including Birmingham/New Orleans and Savannah/Florida), as well as commuter trains making similar moves in

Atlanta (dashed and blue lines).

Late in 2008, Amtrak and Georgia DOT filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board to block the proposed line abandonment (dotted line), precursor to developing transit and greenspace.

After a community outcry led by Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, an agreement was reached calling for intercity trains to use tracks on the west side of downtown, with future accommodation for the already heavy freight traffic on that line.

This will mean back-up moves for some services and may prevent *Crescent* from returning to downtown Atlanta. ■

NARP Files Statement In Appropriations

In a statement on Fiscal 2010 appropriations filed April 16 with Rep. Olver's subcommittee, NARP supported full funding of Amtrak's request (April *News*) and President Obama's future \$5 billion-over-five-years high speed rail request.

NARP said "it is quite possible... where [passenger] operation at 100 or 110 mph would...let a...service achieve an important ridership... threshold...that a private railroad and a state could conclude that...all would be better served by a triple-track, joint-use railroad maintained to FRA Class VI standards, than by two, separate, single-use double-track railroads [passenger and freight]..."

passenger-only, separated right of way... Make no mistake about it—this is a trillion-dollar funding proposition."

Amtrak CEO Joe Boardman favored upgrading selected shared-use tracks to FRA Class VI so passenger trains could reach 110 mph. He said Amtrak runs 95 mph on parts of the Amtrak-owned section of the Chicago-Detroit line. There are plans to increase that speed.

Amtrak also runs 100 mph on parts of the Empire Corridor between Hudson and Schenectady—where turbo trains were allowed 110 mph when they ran in the 1990s—and 90 mph on parts of the Los Angeles-San Diego line. ■

The four witness statements are linked from <http://appropriations.house.gov/> (click on Transportation, HUD).



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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

Obama

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benefit.”

He included “no taking off your shoes” as one advantage of train travel, but, in a serious vein, noted rail’s ability to “reduce destructive emissions and create jobs.”

“The first round of funding [will use] existing infrastructure to increase speeds on some routes from 70 miles an hour to over 100...this is the first step that is quickly achievable, and it will create jobs improving tracks, crossings, signal sys-

tems. The next step is investing in high-speed rail that unleashes the economic potential of all our regions by shrinking distances within our regions...”

He emphasized that “money will be distributed based on merit—not on politics, not as favors...purely on merit.”

“There are those who say at a time of crisis we shouldn’t be pursuing such a strategy...But our history teaches us a different lesson...President Lincoln was committed to a nation connected [by rail] from East to West, even at the same time he was trying to hold North and South together...in the middle of a Civil War.”

Earlier, the Vice President spoke with equal eloquence: “It’s about time we took those railways and made them the national treasures they should be.”

DOT Secretary Ray LaHood: “High speed rail will be one of the legacies of the Obama Administration—their transportation legacy.”

The invited guests at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House included NARP President Ross Capon and other advocates and state and local officials who have worked for years towards a day like this, plus some reporters. The Vice President thanked the group for their advocacy efforts that helped make this event possible.

In an earlier briefing, officials said they expected to receive applications for individual, “ready-to-go” projects 45 days after mid-June release of the guidance to prospective applicants and to award grants in September. ■

The “Vision” is at www.dot.gov; Biden and Obama comments are at www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office

ARC/ARRA Clarification

The Economic Recovery law (ARRA) has \$1.5 billion in “commitment authority” for transit New Starts. This is in addition to actual appropriated funds, including \$8.4 billion for transit, \$9.3 billion for intercity passenger trains.

The \$1.5 billion cannot be spent until it is appropriated, but—once DOT apportions these funds—designated projects are reasonably assured of getting the funds. Apportioned funds can support Early System Work Agreements.

Based on Sen. Lautenberg’s (D-NJ) Feb. 23 release, our March *News* said the ARRA has “up to \$1.5 billion” for the new Hudson River railroad tunnels. This project, whose *design* we oppose because the tunnels will not serve New York’s Penn Station, is a New Start.

It is unlikely that any one project would get all \$1.5 billion. But, to advance at this stage, the tunnels do need \$750 million, so NJT presumably is pushing very hard for that.

NARP strongly supports new tunnels, but urges USDOT to require a direct track connection to Penn Station. It is still possible to develop a sensible plan that provides needed capacity and would speed completion of the tunnels.

TRAVELERS’ ADVISORY

Earlier *Texas Eagle*—Effective April 20, departs all stations St. Louis to Chicago 35 min. earlier.

Notable May 11 Timetable Changes—eastbound *Lake Shore Ltd.* one hour earlier, eastbound *Capitol Limited* 15 minutes earlier, westbound *Piedmont* 10 minutes earlier; eastbound *Piedmont* 25 minutes earlier. National timetable **will not** have Northeast Corridor and *Empire Service* schedules due to extensive track work requiring many schedule changes—starting Apr. 20—to be shown in wallet timetable cards. Contact Amtrak before traveling.

Lake Shore Limited—Sun.-Thurs. (Sat.-Wed. from Chicago), April 12-May 27, the Boston-Albany section will be a bus, not serving Framingham or Back Bay (CSX trackwork in single track territory).