



Obama: “We do big things” like high-speed rail

White House calls for \$53 billion 6-year investment in modern passenger train network

“Within 25 years, our goal is to give 80 percent of Americans access to high-speed rail. This could allow you to go places in half the time it takes to travel by car. For some trips, it will be faster than flying — without the pat-down. As we speak, routes in California and the Midwest are already underway.”

- President Barack Obama, *State of the Union*, Jan. 25

“The investments we’re making in rail pale in comparison to that we’d have to make in highways and runways [otherwise]...”

“There are three places where we cannot compromise: education, innovation, infrastructure. The rest of the world is not compromising.”

- Vice President Joe Biden, at *Philadelphia 30th Street Station* Feb. 8

NARP applauds President Obama and Vice President Biden for making a bold call for the investment necessary to give all Americans the choice of fast, frequent, modern train travel.

For the second year in a row, Obama gave prominent mention to passenger trains in his State of the Union Address. He included high-speed rail among the major investments the U.S. must make to “win the future” by remaining secure and economically strong in the face of 21st-century challenges.

In Philadelphia two weeks later, Biden echoed many of Obama’s points about trains that NARP makes. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter also spoke.

“We cannot compete without a modern, efficient, environmentally-friendly and truly national transportation system,” Biden remarked. “Amtrak produces \$2.4 trillion [in economic benefits]. If we didn’t have the Northeast Corridor, ... we would have to add seven lanes to I-95.

“I’ve spent my career promoting rail travel and preventing Amtrak, a national jewel, from being cannibalized...”

The Administration proposes \$53 billion over six years in high-speed and intercity passenger rail (HSIPR) investment.

These funds will “keep the country on-

track toward a system that gives 80% of Americans access to a passenger rail system featuring high-speed service within 25 years.”

The administration proposes \$8 billion for HSIPR in 2012. Of that, \$4 billion would fund “network development” (new infrastructure, stations and equipment). The other half would go to “sys-

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- Official White House Photo, David Lienemann
Vice President Biden and Secretary LaHood (left) ride *Acela Express* from Washington to Philadelphia on Feb. 8

THIS YEAR’S FUNDING THREATENED: TAKE ACTION

Coming in stark contrast to the White House’s push for greater rail investment, the House Appropriations Committee’s plan for a final continuing resolution for Fiscal 2011 zeroes out the high-speed rail (HSR) program and cuts Amtrak’s capital budget.

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California’s HSR: First Segment Set

Fresno-Bakersfield link to benefit San Joaquin riders

Thanks to an added \$616 million grant made possible by rejection of funds in Ohio and Wisconsin, California’s first high speed rail segment will link two significant cities. It will run about 120 miles — from roughly five miles north of Bakersfield to about 10 miles north of Fresno.

Moreover, existing *San Joaquin* trains will be able to use the line initially, speeding travel on trips linking Oakland or Sacramento with Bakersfield and (via bus connections) Los Angeles.

These trains also will be able to use the planned, new high-speed rail Fresno



- California High-Speed Rail Authority
Rendering of a future California high-speed train passing through a wind energy farm.

station when it is built.

Eventually, the line will become part of

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New House Transportation Leaders Speak on Amtrak, High-Speed Rail

Chairmen Mica & Shuster Meet with Passenger Train Industry, Supporters

House Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) Chairman John Mica (R-FL) convened a field hearing Jan. 27 on “Developing True High-Speed Rail to the Northeast Corridor (NEC): Stop Sitting on Our Federal Assets.”

The hearing, at New York’s Grand Central Terminal, boasted star witnesses New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg (R) and former Gov. Ed Rendell (D-PA).

Mica also chaired an afternoon “roundtable” at the New York MTA board room that included, among others, NARP Pres. Ross Capon, Federal Railroad Deputy Administrator Karen Rae, Amtrak Pres. Joseph Boardman, four finance experts, and committee members.

Mica wants to see true high-speed rail in the NEC sooner than 2040. He thinks private capital and expertise is critical. The hearing’s title reflects his lack of confidence in Amtrak’s ability to deliver.

The finance experts on the roundtable lowered expectations about how much money the private sector can bring to the table for infrastructure.

Kent Rowley of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer said public funding of the Taiwan bullet train project was 95% while private participation was 5%, which the government either has repaid or will repay.

This led Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) to observe, “It’s clear that there’s no free lunch; getting high speed rail is going to require a huge federal investment.”

Capon and Petra Todovorich, director

of America 2050, emphasized the importance of protecting the existing railroad by moving ahead with projects outlined in the multi-agency NEC Infrastructure Master Plan (May-June News).

Capon said it would be terrible if the NEC collapsed while everyone focused on building a new, 220 mph railroad. He said a shutdown was a real possibility, for example, if the century-old Hackensack River bridge failed. He lamented that the

“We Do Big Things”

tem preservation” — attaining and maintaining passenger rail assets in a state of good repair; supporting the national network (operating and capital).”

“The system will allow the Department [of Transportation] -- in partnership with states, freight rail[roads], and private companies -- to identify corridors for the construction of world-class high-speed rail, while raising speeds on existing lines and providing crucial planning resources to communities who want to join the national high-speed rail network,” says a White House press release.

“With rail ridership reaching all-time highs in many areas of the country during 2010, these investments will ensure that more Americans have the option of taking a train to reach their destination.”

At a high speed rail conference Feb.

project to replace that bridge apparently died with the ARC (see page 3).

He said British corridors with top speeds of 125 mph had average speeds lower than Amtrak’s. The Acela New York-Washington is 80.2 mph; Virgin London-Liverpool about 75.6 mph (both routes have trips with varying speeds).

The day before the hearing, Mica invited a small group of rail professionals, in-

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V.P. Biden and NARP's Capon, after the Feb. 8 event.

8, Deputy Federal Railroad Administrator Karen Rae responded to the view that money is being spread around to “marginal projects”: “We gave money to 36 states but most of that was for planning. Over \$8 billion went to just six corridors. All the grants came about due to applications filed by the states.”

Post-Recovery Act funds require a 20% non-federal contribution. If a cash-strapped state is willing to help pay for a project which FRA finds worthy, it is likely that the money will be well spent. ■

White House release is at www.bit.ly/whrail. NARP's is at www.bit.ly/f6ID8i

Amtrak’s Strong 35-Year Ridership Gains

Route	FY 2010 Ridership (thousands)	FY 1975 Ridership (thousands)
San Luis Obispo - Los Angeles - San Diego	2,613.6	353.6
San Jose – Oakland - Sacramento	1,580.6	N/A (note 1)
New York – Albany – Syracuse – Buffalo – Niagara Falls - Toronto	1,367.6	660.9
Chicago - Milwaukee	783.1	244.9
Chicago – Springfield - St. Louis	572.5	281.9
Chicago – Kalamazoo - Detroit - Pontiac	479.8	333.1
Boston - Portland, ME	478.5	N/A (note 2)
Washington, DC – Richmond – Newport News, VA	468.1	N/A (note 3)

NARP President Ross Capon used the table at left in a Feb. 8 presentation at a U.S. High Speed Rail Association conference. He emphasized the importance of recognizing the value of conventional rail development. Californians’ familiarity with conventional trains probably helped gain voter approval of the \$10 billion HSR bond issue in Nov. 2008. ■

(1) Corridor service began in 1991.

(2) Service began in December 2001, having been absent since 1964.

(#) Service began in June 1976.

NJ Senators and Amtrak Unveil Hudson River Tunnel Plan

A new "Gateway Project" was unveiled Feb. 7 by Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez (both D-NJ), Amtrak President & CEO Joseph Boardman, and Anthony Coscia. Coscia serves on the boards of both Amtrak and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The tunnels would lead to new and existing tracks in New York's Penn Station.

The \$13.5 billion price tag includes tunnels, a new Penn Station South, and new bridges over New Jersey's Hackensack River to replace the aging Portal Bridge (Dec. '10 News). Once funded, the project would take ten years to complete.

An essentially double-track Newark-NYC railroad would become a four-track railroad. Penn Station South would be four new stub-end tracks, which might someday be extended eastward.

Amtrak estimates that upon completion, Penn Station would accommodate eight more Northeast Corridor trains per hour, two additional Empire Corridor trains, 13 more New Jersey Transit and one more Long Island Rail Road. Additionally, space will be available for six hourly Metro-North Hudson and New Haven Line trains to be brought into Penn instead of Grand Central.

Boardman called Gateway a "critical first step that we can take now to bring 220 mph Amtrak high-speed service to the Northeast Corridor." Amtrak sees the 220 mph Boston-Washington trains it proposed last year (Oct. News) initially sharing the Gateway tunnels with commuter and conventional intercity trains.

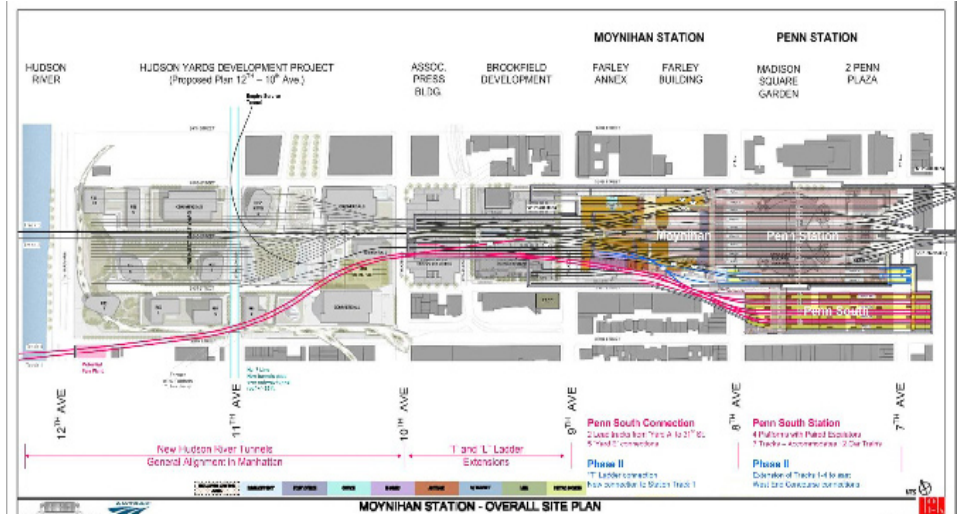
Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ), who last year canceled the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) tunnel project, told Fox News that "this Amtrak deal seems like it's the beginning of a better deal."

Amtrak will take the lead in finding funds for the project. "Most, if not all, of [the money set aside for ARC] is no longer available, people involved in the planning said" (New York Times, Feb. 8). ■

FLORIDA UPDATES

Gov. Rick Scott (R) has not decided whether to proceed with Tampa-Orlando HSR. Chairman Mica says the added federal funds, plus private funds, should be sufficient.

Scott put on hold contracts related to SunRail (Central Florida commuter rail; March 2009 News). Mica is a strong SunRail supporter.



Amtrak's illustrative design for what the Moynihan/Penn Station complex will look like in 10-15 years. New tunnels indicated by lines coming up from south; existing tunnels are straight horizontal lines. Existing Penn platforms will be largely commuter-only; Amtrak trains will use the new Moynihan Station: a reconstruction of the Farley Post Office between 8th & 9th Aves.

California Starter Line

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a future San Francisco-Los Angeles link with top speeds of 220 mph.

This fits with federal law, which requires improvements to existing train service for projects receiving federal High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail funds.

"Ohio's loss is our gain," said California High-Speed Rail Authority Vice Chair Tom Umberg. "This is the right place to start and the right way to start."

The Central Valley starter line, with a construction price tag of \$5.5 billion, will be completely grade-separated (no road-railroad crossings) and will roughly parallel the existing BNSF line used by the *San Joaquin* trains. Two new stations will be built, and some existing infrastructure relocated.

On the new line, speeds of diesel trains will be the locomotives' top speed, now 103-109 mph. The cars are good for 125 mph, which could be achieved if diesel operation continues and high-speed locomotives are procured.

Time savings for the diesel trains apparently would be 50 minutes with existing diesels and 70 minutes with new.

The Federal Railroad Administration, as a condition of awarding the Recovery Act grant, required funds to be used on one of two Central Valley segments; the other possibility was Merced-Fresno.

Some have complained about the relatively small size of Fresno and Bakersfield, but this choice permits a long segment with fewer obstacles and where

higher speeds can be achieved.

For similar reasons, the first segments of the Interstate Highway System were built in rural areas. ■

More at www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov

MEETING UPDATES

Changes and additions to the list that appeared in the January News. For full details, visit www.narprail.org/calendar or call 202-408-8362.

Schenectady, Mar. 12: NARP Chairman Bob Stewart and Empire State Passengers Assn. President/NARP Director Bruce Becker will speak.

Washington, DC, Mar. 19: More speakers: Virginia Railway Express CEO Dale Zehner, MARC's David Johnson and DC Dept. of Transportation officials.

Boston, Mar. 26: Registration form and updated flyer now available at www.bit.ly/bosnarp

Chicago, Apr. 30: Midwest High-Speed Rail Assoc. annual meeting. 9:00-3:00, Dank Haus, 4740 N. Western Ave. (at CTA Brown Line Western Ave. station). \$40 includes lunch. Speakers & agenda TBA. See www.midwesthsr.org/2011-annual-meeting



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OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

Amtrak Threatened *from page 1*

The Committee would cut Amtrak capital \$202 million below the Obama request, to \$850 million. This is \$151.6 million below the 2010 level.

This cut likely means *significant* layoffs in Amtrak's capital workforce—the men and women who do the basic work to keep the trains running. That would mean deterioration in Amtrak's rolling stock and infrastructure.

It also puts in doubt Amtrak's ability to invest in fleet expansion or additional service—crucial for responding to soaring ridership.

The cut is particularly harsh since it takes effect over five months into the fiscal year and must be accomplished in less than seven months rather than 12.

Moreover, things could get worse if the full House adopts anti-Amtrak amendments during consideration of the continuing resolution, expected the week of Feb. 14.

Regarding HSR funding, that is, capital grants to states for intercity passenger rail, NARP joined a diverse coalition of 91 organizations, business groups, mayors and councils which wrote Feb. 10 in support of at least \$3.5 billion.

While the Senate is expected to adopt higher numbers than the House, the outcome of the House-Senate conference likely will be better the higher the House numbers are.

Visit www.bit.ly/11funds to take action now, or call the Capitol switchboard: 202-225-3121.

JAZZ MUSICIANS TO TOUR U.S. BY RAIL

The Blue Cranes, an indie jazz quintet from Portland, Oregon, will embark on their first national tour in April — all by train. They will go to the East Coast and back, stopping for concerts along the way. Funds were raised online to cover the costs.

The Blue Cranes' photos feature trains and stations, and members long have been interested in train travel. Concertgoers will be informed about NARP and invited to join.

More at www.bluecranesmusic.com and at www.narprail.org/blog

House Continuing Resolution

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cluding Capon, to an 8 AM coffee. There he offered his support for a robust rail title in the upcoming surface transportation law reauthorization, incorporating more opportunities for innovative financing and public-private partnerships.

Mica thinks much of Amtrak's operation, including the NEC and Auto Train, should be franchised out. The next day, Amtrak issued a release stating emphatically that the NEC should remain a public asset.

Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA) addressed the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board's Intercity Passenger Rail Committee on Jan. 25 in Washington, DC. He chairs the T&I Railroads Subcommittee.

"High-speed rail is essential to the future of transportation in America to ease crowding," Shuster proclaimed. "I was originally anti-train, but I'm now the post-er child for intercity train travel."

Shuster touted the success of Amtrak's New York-Harrisburg *Keystone Corridor*, whose ridership has increased 43% in the past five years, saying he rides it frequently. He wants to see Amtrak included in the upcoming surface transportation law reauthorization, but also wants to allow private companies to compete with Amtrak.

Shuster indicated openness to giving states more flexibility in the use of federal transportation dollars, and to implementing a vehicle miles traveled tax. ■

Jan. 27 hearing opening statements of Mica and Shuster, and prepared witness statements, are at <http://transportation.house.gov>

Hawaii Organizes

The first-ever meeting of NARP members in the Aloha State (of whom there are 25) took place Jan. 20 at Honolulu's prestigious Pacific Club.

Sumimoto of America, one of three companies vying to build Honolulu's new heavy-rail transit system, hosted the luncheon. The company's vice president Gino Antoniello spoke.

Outgoing Gov. Linda Lingle (R) commissioned a report by known rail critic Tom Rubin, which inflated the Honolulu system's projected costs. NARP issued a fact sheet in response, available at www.bit.ly/honorail. ■