SPEEDLINES

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Imagine America connected coast-to-coast by sleek high-speed trains. This bold vision for HSR could revolutionize how Americans live, work, and travel.

THE IIJA OFFERS SIGNIFICANT FEDERAL FUNDING FOR RAIL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE U. S. FROM 2022 TO 2026, IT EXPANDS EXISTING FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMS AND INTRODUCES NEW ONES TO IMPROVE THE RAIL NETWORK. THE IIJA ALLOCATES $102 BILLION FOR RAIL, CONSISTING OF $66 BILLION FROM ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS AND $36 BILLION IN AUTHORIZED FUNDING.

FEATURE ARTICLE
PG. 19
SPECIAL REPORT ON INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

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FRONT COVER:

OVER THE LAST FIVE DECADES, HIGH-SPEED TRAINS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THEIR VALUE GLOBALLY. NOT JUST THROUGH TRAVEL TIMES BUT, MORE CRUCIALLY, THEY CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GENERATE EMPLOYMENT, AND UNITE COMMUNITIES. CHINA, JAPAN, AND EUROPE ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THIS INNOVATION. ALTHOUGH THE US WAS AMONG THE PIONEERS OF HIGH-SPEED TRAINS, THEIR OPERATIONS REMAIN RESTRICTED TO THE EAST COAST AND MIDWEST REGIONS. THE $1.2 TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE BILL PASSED IN 2021 ALLOCATES $102 BILLION FOR RAIL PROJECTS, YET NONE OF THIS FUNDING IS DESIGNATED FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL SYSTEMS. IN SHARP CONTRAST, CHINA MANAGES ITS RAIL NETWORK DIFFERENTLY AND PLANS TO EXPAND ITS HIGH-SPEED RAIL SYSTEM TO OVER 31,000 MILES (50,000 KILOMETERS) WITHIN THIS YEAR.

HS&IPR Committee & Friends

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

A MESSAGE FROM CHAD EDISON

Welcome to California and the APTA High-Speed Rail Seminar being held in conjunction with the 2025 Rail Conference in San Franciso. I am delighted we will be able to showcase many of the passenger rail improvements we have made in California over the past decade. I invite you to take some of the tours and especially to ride the electrified Caltrain service connecting San Francisco to San Jose and Silicon Valley. The California State Transportation Agency and the California High Speed Rail Authority helped fund the electrification as a prelude to high-speed rail service sharing tracks with Caltrain, collectively providing more of the funding than either our federal or local partners. We helped them get to 100% electric service by expanding their rolling stock order. We are even paying 100% of the costs of the research and development to demonstrate a battery-electric train that will be able to run beyond San Jose to Gilroy where there is not yet electric wire.

The June 27th seminar, titled "High-Speed Rail: Connecting America," will focus on the technical and policy challenges of developing a nationwide high-speed and intercity rail system. Several prominent figures in the passenger rail industry will be featured speakers including Mario Péloquin, CEO of VIA Rail in Canada, and Ian Choudri, Chief Executive Officer of the California High Speed Rail Authority.

We have a lot to celebrate. In 2024, Amtrak and Brightline carried more passengers than at any other time in their history. VIA Rail is on pace to achieve similar record-breaking ridership levels by the end of 2025. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) released its long awaited Congressionally mandated Amtrak Long Distance Service Study in January. The study recommended the addition of 15 new long-distance routes to complete the national intercity passenger rail network.

But despite these achievements, we still have a lot of work ahead of us to maintain this pace and grow passenger volumes to levels not seen since the Golden Age of passenger rail. Part of this work is to assure that government at all levels make the investments necessary to renew infrastructure, improve stations, expand routes, replace aging equipment and increase levels of service. Advocacy and education of newly elected representatives will be key to this effort.

This new issue of SPEEDLINES is designed to provide valuable information to aid in this advocacy effort. It highlights the legislative history of Congressional support for passenger rail in the United States. The newsletter also describes some of the ways past appropriations are being put to good use and the status of the 69 projects selected for the Corridor Identification program managed by the FRA. We invited our friends at the Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations (AIPRO) to make the case for increased competition for intercity passenger rail. In addition, articles about overnight trains underscore a growing interest in this segment of the intercity travel market that could encourage more private sector investment and competition.

I am encouraged by Congressional support and Presidential interest in maintaining financial support for the national network. Continued project development and funding support will be critical as the most-ready projects in the pipeline of projects work their way through the FRA Corridor Identification program from planning to implementation.

Enjoy this edition of SPEEDLINES and the APTA Rail Conference. I hope to see you at the High-Speed Rail Seminar as well.

Chad Edison

PROJECT PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

Contributed by: SPEEDLINES STAFF

This Special Report on Intercity Passenger Rail highlights regional planning, project development and delivery of projects funded by Congressional enactments and appropriations. The updates are organized by regions of the country defined by the Federal Railroad Administration.

REGIONAL RAIL PLANS

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) led multi-state planning efforts in the Northeast Corridor (NEC) that stretches from Washington, DC to Boston, MA and potential high-performance rail networks in the Southwest, Southeast and Midwest regions. The Southern Rail Commission, formed by the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, advanced planning efforts for the restoration and improvement of passenger rail along the Gulf Coast.

NORTHEAST CORRIDOR

The FRA developed a long-term vision and comprehensive investment plan for the NEC, which is the rail transportation spine of the Northeast region and is a key part of the region's transportation system. The NEC is vital to its sustained economic growth. Today, the 457-mile NEC is one of the most heavily traveled rail corridors in the world. The NEC is shared by intercity, commuter, and freight train operations and moves more than 365 million passengers and 14 million car-miles of freight per year.

The NEC faces serious challenges with century-old infrastructure, outdated technology and inadequate capacity to meet current or projected travel demand. Over the years a significant amount of deferred maintenance and renewal backlog has grown to over a $20 billion deficit simply to bring the NEC to a state of good repair. With similar capacity issues on the region's highways, and some of the most congested airports in the nation, the Northeast's economic future could be hampered by transportation constraints unless these constraints are

addressed. NEC FUTURE creates a framework to address some of these challenges and defines the investments needed to improve passenger rail capacity and service through 2040 and beyond. The FRA completed a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and issued a Record of Decision in July 2017. The Record of Decision identified a preferred alternative, which focused on maintaining and improving the existing NEC alignment while optimizing added capacity to support growth in the region.

Beginning in July 2019, the NEC Commission member agencies (eight states and nine railroad operators between Boston, MA and Washington, DC) launched a joint effort to develop a Strategic Development Plan to advance the NEC FUTURE vision. The first phase of the plan, referred to as CONNECT NEC 2035, considered corridor-wide needs through the lens of individual railroad operators. This first phase focused on what could be realistically carried out over the next 15 years to bring the NEC to a state of good repair, relieve key choke-points, improve reliability, add capacity, and improve speeds. A consultant team led by AECOM and Arup developed a rigorous analytical framework for sequencing capital investments to minimize service impacts and optimize resources.

A total of 11 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grants totaling $983 million were awarded for projects on the Northeast Corridor (NEC), a 455-mile corridor running from Washington, DC, through New York, NY to Boston, MA. The bulk of that funding went to two projects in New Jersey. These projects for the NEC included power, signal, track, catenary improvements between Trenton, NJ, and New York, NY; upgrades to electrical power, signal systems, tracks, and overhead catenary wires between Trenton and New Brunswick, NJ allowing Acela high-speed trains to travel up to 160-mph.

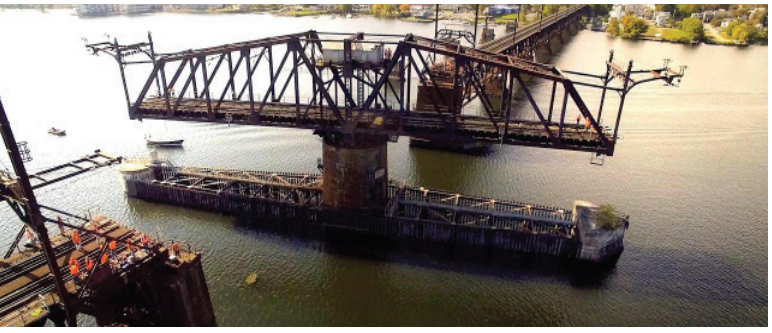
Projects along the Northeast Corridor have recently received grants under IIJA to renew or replace infrastructure that is life-expired or heavily damaged by storms.

These projects include:

GATEWAY PROGRAM: The $16 billion Gateway Program is an ongoing expansion and renovation of the NEC rail line between Newark Penn Station and New York Penn Station. The project includes new rail bridges in the New Jersey Meadowlands, a new set of tunnels under Bergen Hill and the Hudson River, rehabilitate the existing 1910 tunnel, and construct a new terminal annex. The improvements are designed to double train capacity and permit more high-speed rail service along the current right-of-way, whose two-track rail line, used both by Amtrak and NJ Transit trains, has reached its full capacity of 24 trains per hour. These improvements will increase the network capacity for train traffic growth. Without the investment, significant failures will occur that could shut the NEC down. Over $12 billion in federal funding has been committed construction is underway. The new tunnel is scheduled to open in 2035, with the rehabilitation of the existing North River Tunnels to be completed by 2038.

BALTIMORE & POTOMAC (B&P) TUNNEL REPLACEMENT: The up to $4.7 billion project includes final design and construction of the Baltimore and Potomac tunnel replacement, to be known as the

Frederick Douglass Tunnel. The B&P Tunnel is 150 years old and dates to the Civil War era. It is also the largest bottleneck on the NEC between Washington, DC and New Jersey. In 2024, Amtrak awarded a Delivery Partner contract, which includes design oversight, construction management, contract management and other administrative support, among other tasks to advance – a joint venture between major infrastructure firms AECOM and Jacobs. Amtrak also awarded a contract to Kiewit/J.F. Shea Joint Venture to design and build the brand new, state-of-the-art passenger rail tunnel that will serve electrified Amtrak and MARC commuter trains.



SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BRIDGE REPLACEMENT: (Up to $2.1 billion) The project includes final design and construction for two new fixed, two-track bridges over the Susquehanna River between Havre De Grace and Perryville, Maryland, replacing the current 117-year-old, two-track structure that is beyond its useful life.

CONNECTICUT RIVER BRIDGE REPLACEMENT (Up to $826.6 million) The project includes construction to replace the existing 116-year-old Connecticut River bridge between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme, CT.

EAST RIVER TUNNEL REHABILITATION (Up to $1.26 billion) The project includes final design and reconstruction of the 100-year-old East River Tunnels in New York City damaged by Super Storm Sandy. The tubes, which opened in 1910, require significant upgrades and comprehensive rehabilitation to modernize critical NEC infrastructure and improve reliability. The project includes rebuilding tunnel infrastructure, improving safety, reliability, and security and bring the systems to a state of good repair. The project will involve demolishing the existing tunnel systems down to the concrete liners, followed by reconstructing and modernizing all tunnel systems.

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL RAIL PLAN

The Southwest Multi-State Rail Planning Study completed in 2014 was the very first high-performance rail network planning study led by the FRA. The Southwest study was a test case for the guidelines, tools, and performance standards developed as part of FRA's national planning effort. The Southwest region was selected as the setting for the first, and prototype, multi-state rail planning study due to the longstanding interest in the development of high-performance rail services by the region's states and localities as evidenced by the creation of the Western States High-Speed Rail Alliance. The Western High-Speed Rail Alliance exists for the purpose of determining the viability of developing and promoting a high-performance rail network throughout the Rocky Mountain region with eventual connections to the Pacific Coast and other regions of the United States.

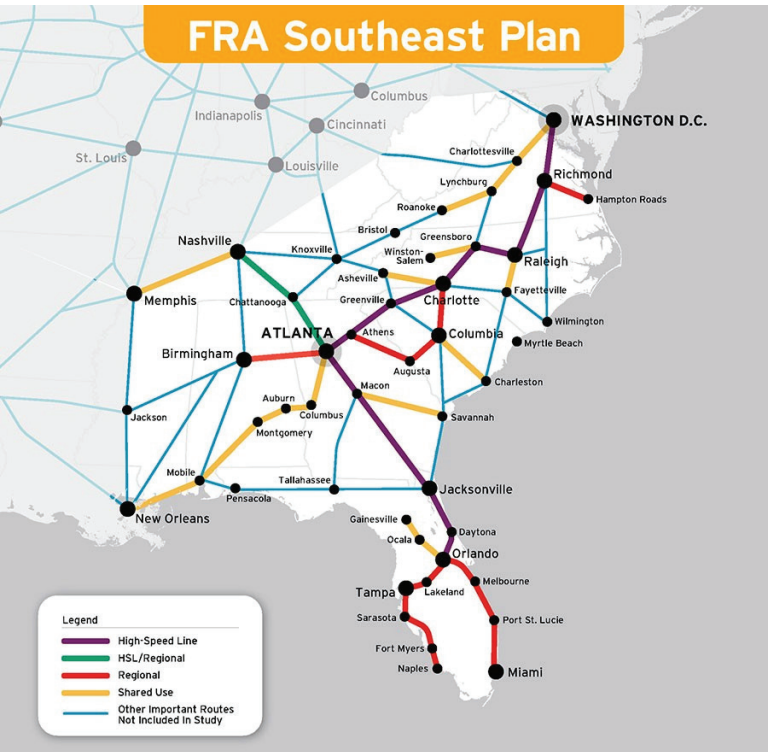
A potential conceptual regional rail network was developed and is presented in the figure below. A comparison of the performance of all 11 corridors as a stand-alone corridor versus a full network showed that connectivity associated with the full network yielded higher ridership and revenues and lower capital and

operating and maintenance costs.

Several corridors are depicted as Regional, showing that these might start as high performance corridors, potentially growing into high-speed rail (Core Express) based on other investments in the network. Alternatively, these could exist as hybrid corridors with Core Express equipment running through service at reduced speeds mixed with commuter or traditional intercity service, sometimes labeled "blended service."

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL RAIL PLAN NETWORK

In 2016, FRA initiated the Southeast multi-state regional planning study. The plan was intended to unite state rail planning in this region, foster multi-state coordination and provide a framework for governance and operation of interstate and inter-regional passenger service planning. A Generalized Network Vision that described the communities to be served by rail and the corridors that link them were prepared along with a Service Plan to describe the range of train services (frequencies, speeds, capacity) connecting the markets in the network and how those services would operate and interact in the network. A second phase of the study (Phase II) was launched in fall 2019 to incorporate improvements to the CONNECT model (which serves as the analytical foundation of FRA-led regional passenger rail planning studies) to reflect more consistent information for demand forecasting. Since then, the southeastern states (GA, NC, TN, FL, SC, and VA) have been working together to create the Southeast Corridor Commission. The states recently voted to accept the Southeast Rail Plan. The proposed high-performance rail network is depicted in the figure below.



The Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor extends 730 miles, from Washington, DC, to Atlanta, GA. The corridor received eight (8) ARRA grants totaling $740 million. Of that, grants totaling $630 million were made for improvements to the 173-mile portion of the corridor running between Charlotte and Raleigh in North Carolina; the largest grant was $520 million. Specifically, the Piedmont Improvement Program involved: Building 13 bridges, adding 27 miles of parallel, or second track, making the entire 92-mile segment double track, adding five miles of passing sidings between Raleigh and Greensboro to help freight and passenger trains move in a more reliable and timely manner, renovating train stations in Cary, High Point, Burlington and Kannapolis and refurbishing and adding passenger rail cars to

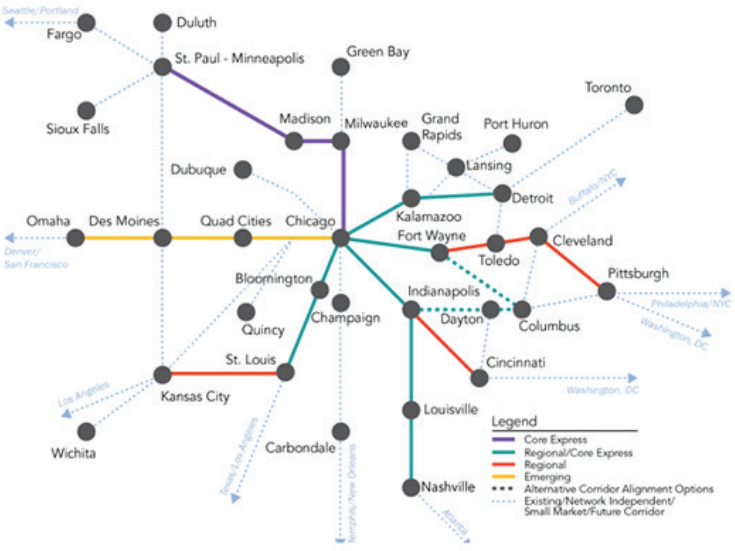
the fleet. Service was increased between Raleigh and Charlotte from three trains per day to five. This project aimed to improve safety largely by upgrading infrastructure that eliminated grade crossings.

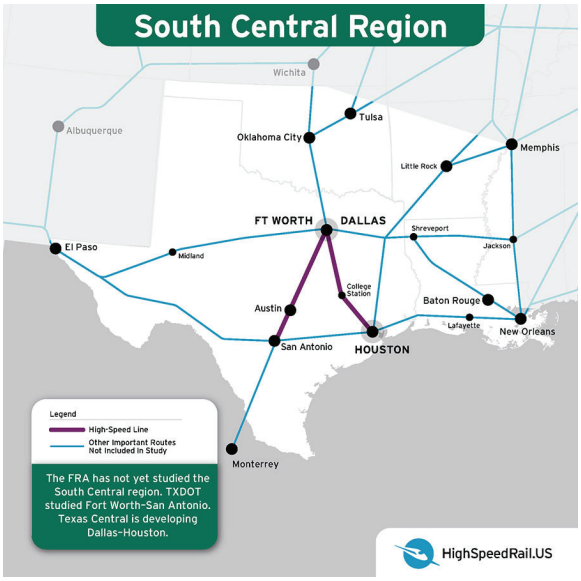
Work along the critical S Line Corridor from Richmond, VA to Raleigh, NC recently received $1,095 million through the IIJA. Restoration/upgrade of the S Line will trim nearly one hour off the Washington, DC to Charlotte NC travel time. At the northern end of the Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor, Virginia received $729 Million through the IIJA to advance the construction of a second two track bridge across the Potomac River between Arlington, VA and Washington, DC. The new Long Bridge will double the capacity at this critical location and provide a dedicated crossing for passenger trains.

MIDWEST REGIONAL RAIL PLAN

The Midwest Regional Rail Plan study began in early 2017 and was built on rail planning efforts within the twelve states of Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, North Dakota, Indiana, and Minnesota. The regional plan explored the potential for a fully integrated passenger rail network linking communities throughout the region. The study effort evaluated potential markets, corridors, ridership, and costs as well as governance and/or institutional options. Midwest Regional Rail Plan (MWRRP) was completed in October 2021. The analyses proved that the strongest corridors for prioritized development connect to Chicago. The MWRRP work explored several options beyond the hub-and-spoke connections to other large metropolitan areas.

Midwest Regional Rail Plan Network





One of the glaring problems with the Midwest plan is that some corridors were ignored because states did not actively take part in the study process. The Congressionally designated high-speed rail corridor connecting Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati (3C+D) is not a prominent feature of the MWRRP, essentially eliminating an important network connector allowing north-south travel. The 3C+D Corridor is relegated to a "small market" future corridor. Ohio did not actively take part in the study and is not a member of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

NATIONAL RAIL PLAN

PRIIA required FRA to develop "a long-range national rail plan consistent with approved State Rail Plans and the rail needs of the Nation as determined by the Secretary to promote an integrated, cohesive, efficient, and optimized national rail system for the movement of goods and people." The FRA prepared a Preliminary National Rail Plan in October 2009. The Preliminary Plan outlined the FRA's proposed approach to developing the long-range National Rail Plan, including goals and objectives for the greater inclusion of rail in the national transportation system. The Preliminary Plan did not provide specific recommendations, but it did identify issues that should be considered in formulating the National Rail Plan.

As of May 2025, there is no National Rail Plan, but there is a continuing need to complete a national rail plan that guides passenger rail service development over the course of the next several decades much like the interstate highway system was planned and constructed. There needs to be consensus that spans time and does not come undone by political changes in Congress or the White House. The IIJA provides a structure to guide

project development through the Corridor Identification and Development program.

If you stitch together the regional rail plans you get the semblance of a national rail plan, especially when you add the NEC, the Texas Central Dallas – Houston project and the Cascadia Corridor. The map shows that large sections of the United States could be served by fast, frequent trains if the lines recommended by the FRA's studies were built. These lines would create the spine of an integrated rail network serving their megaregions and connecting corridors across regions where warranted.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION

Passenger rail service is being restored to the Gulf Coast after a 20-year absence due to Hurricane Karina thanks to federal grants for capital and operating assistance. Brightline West and the California high-speed rail projects are under construction largely because of federal investment. The Texas Dallas – Houston high-speed rail project is currently in Step 3 of the FRA passenger rail development program conducting preliminary engineering preparatory to construction activities.

Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Restoration

The Southern Rail Commission was established in 1982 to foster the development and enhancement of passenger rail services in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Over the years the Commission has led numerous initiatives focused on passenger rail service in the three-state region. One of the Commission's recent initiatives is the restoration of Gulf Coast passenger rail service which was lost after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This route was previously served by the Sunset Limited which ran between Los Angeles, New Orleans and Orlando. Following the hurricane, service was stopped at New Orleans.

The aim of the service restoration is to start new passenger train service between New Orleans and Mobile with two round trips each day, morning and evening, with stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pascagoula offering business-friendly schedules.

The Gulf Coast states pledged funding and secured a $33 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) federal in 2019 to enable capital investments that are needed to bring new and drastically improved passenger rail service back between New Orleans, LA and Mobile, AL. The grant will be matched with commitments from the state of Mississippi, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Amtrak, and private partners, and is paired with priority investments from the state of Louisiana.

Restoration of Gulf Coast service was the subject of Surface Transportation Board (STB) hearings in 2022. In March 2021, Amtrak filed an application with the STB seeking an order requiring CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS) to allow Amtrak to run added intercity passenger trains over its freight rail lines between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama. CSX, NS, the Alabama State Port Authority and its rail carrier, the Terminal Railway Alabama State Docks opposed Amtrak's proposal to operate passenger trains along the former route of the Sunset Limited, expressing concern that this could negatively impact its ability to move freight from the Port of Alabama in Mobile. Amtrak studies showed the route had sufficient capacity to host both freight and passenger trains.

The STB held a multi-day hearing on the matter during 2022. On November 22, 2022, before the STB made its decision on the matter, the STB granted a motion from the parties to hold the proceeding in abeyance while the parties worked to implement a settlement agreement. Amtrak, the freight railroads and the Alabama State Port Authority announced an agreement to allow passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast corridor to resume.

In September 2023, Amtrak and the Southern Rail Commission (SRC) submitted a joint application with the freight railroads as partners to FRA requesting $178.4 million in CRISI program grant funds, matched by $44.6 million in non-federal funding for the Gulf Coast Corridor Improvement Program (GCCIP). The estimated cost of the program of projects is $223 million.

The improvements include lengthening passing sidings to allow for longer freight trains, extending main tracks, installing new switches and turnouts, constructing more crossovers, and improving stations, yards, and grade crossings. The project will facilitate the reintroduction of two round trip intercity passenger trains per day while mitigating potential adverse impacts to freight operations from CSX, NS, and the Port of Mobile, as well as help achieve targeted trip times and service reliability. This project also qualified for the statutory set-asides for projects in Rural Areas and New Intercity Passenger Rail.

In October 2024, Amtrak asked the STB to dismiss its petition asking the Board to compel freight railroads to allow operation of passenger trains along the Gulf Coast saying the terms of an agreement between Amtrak, CSX, NS and the Alabama Port Authority have been fulfilled — even though the service has yet to begin - ending a very prolonged and contentious disagreement. The restored service will include the connection from New Orleans to Mobile, with four stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula likely in coastal Mississippi.

Also in October 2024, Mobile broke ground on a new passenger station platform while CSX was adding layover track to allow for minimum impact from passenger trains to freight operations at the Port of Mobile. Once this station is complete, passenger rail service could resume on the Gulf Coast 20 years after Hurricane Katrina ended it. The new train, named the Mardi Gras, with new service expected summer 2025 according to Amtrak officials.

Brightline West

Brightline West officially broke ground in April 2024 on its 218-mile high-speed rail line connecting Las Vegas to Southern California. Brightline is the only private provider of intercity passenger rail service in America. At speeds of up to 200 miles per hour, trains will take passengers from Las Vegas to Rancho Cucamonga in about two hours, twice as fast as the normal drive time. Brightline West's rail line is being constructed within the median of the I-15 highway with zero grade crossings.

The privately led infrastructure project is one of the largest in the nation and will be constructed and operated by union labor and will be fully Buy America Compliant. It will use 700,000 concrete rail ties, 2.2 million tons of ballast, and 63,000 tons of 100 percent American steel rail during construction. Upon completion, it will include 322 miles of overhead lines to power the trains and will include 3.4 million square feet of retaining walls. The project covers more than 160 structures including viaducts and bridges.

The project was awarded $3 billion in IIJA grant funding from FRA in 2024 and has received a total allocation of $3.5 billion in private activity bonds from USDOT. The remaining $12 billion in project financing will be privately funded. Brightline hopes to complete construction with the goal of having the service operational in time for the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics.

CALIFORNIA

The California high-speed rail project had its genesis in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). The Act presented an overall intermodal approach to highway and public transportation funding. It listed "high priority" highway corridors and called for the designation of up to five high-speed rail corridors. One of the corridors named was the California corridor linking San Diego and Los Angeles with the Bay Area and Sacramento via the San Joaquin Valley.

In 1996, the California Legislature passed the High-Speed Rail Act, which formed and appointed the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) to plan, design, construct and operate a statewide high-speed rail system. The CHSRA was funded entirely by appropriations of the California General Assembly. It did not have, nor does it have, a source of stable, predictable funding underwriting its project management activities. This lack of stable and predictable funding has had a profound effect on how the project was managed and executed. Funding has been a persistent challenge. The stop and go approach have cost the project time and money.

The FRA required California to continue through a tiered environmental review process examining both programmatic and project level environmental impacts. It took 14 years to complete the environmental and regulatory process from beginning to end and address court challenges.

The Notice of Intent to Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the California High Speed Train System was issued on May 2, 2001. The Record of Decision for the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was signed by FRA on August 5, 2005. The Tier 1 EIS document considered, described and summarized the environmental impacts at a programmatic level of analysis for the proposed high-speed train system for intercity travel in California and alternatives that connect the major metropolitan areas of the state from Sacramento, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose, through Stockton, Modesto, Merced, Fresno, and Bakersfield, to Los Angeles, Orange County, and

The California High-Speed Rail Project has spent about $13 billion and created more than 109,000 jobs. $6.9 has been from federal sources.

San Diego.

The CHSRA then divided the entire high-speed train system into project level segments that showed independent utility so project level EIS documents could be prioritized and prepared based on available funding. In February 2007, the CHSRA engaged teams of engineering and environmental consultants to prepare the project level preliminary engineering and environmental clearance documents necessary to propel the project forward. California voters approved Proposition 1A on November 4, 2008, which authorized the California Transportation Commission to issue $10 billion in bonds upon appropriation by the General Assembly to allocate funds for capital improvements to intercity rail lines, commuter rail lines, and urban rail systems that provide direct connectivity to the high-speed train system and its facilities.

The FRA issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Merced to Bakersfield on March 13, 2009, which was later revised to be Merced – Fresno. The Final EIS and Record of Decision was issued on September 18, 2012. The Final EIS and Record of Decision on the Fresno – Bakersfield segment was issued on April 14, 2014. On August 12, 2014, the Surface Transportation Board approved the high-speed rail route from Fresno to Bakersfield. This was the final approval needed before beginning construction. Groundbreaking for the initial construction segment occurred on January 6, 2015.

Construction was divided into four construction packages and design/build contracts awarded to design/build teams. Today, more than 60 miles of contiguous guideway are complete, making those sections ready for tracklaying and there are another 111 miles of active construction and advanced design on-going in the Central Valley. CHSRA is currently seeking proposals from trainset manufacturers and will be procuring rail and electrification system components.

Federal funding from ARRA and IIJA grants total $5.9 billion with an added $1 billion in funding from other

federal programs. California has generated $22.5 billion in state funding through Proposition 1A bonds and Cap and Trade programs. The total estimated cost of the 171-mile segment connecting Merced and Bakersfield ranges between $28 and $35 billion.

Once complete the high-speed rail line can transform how people travel among California's major cities once complete as part of an integrated public transportation system. The 2018 California State Rail Plan determined how the impact of the high-speed rail line combined with network travel can reduce the need to expand highways and airports in the future. The figure depicts travel between California counties in 2040, based on projected population growth. The left graphic depicts the introduction of high-speed rail in blue and the existing conditions in green. The graphic on the right highlights the tremendous growth in rail ridership when the high-speed rail line is integrated with existing commuter, intercity passenger rail and connecting rail transit services in major California cities. The added choice, convenience, affordability and productivity gained by travelers using rail passenger service can potentially result in an explosion of usage generating significant economic benefits.

The California high-speed rail system is a transformative investment worthy of continuing and essential for a sustainable future.

DALLAS – HOUSTON

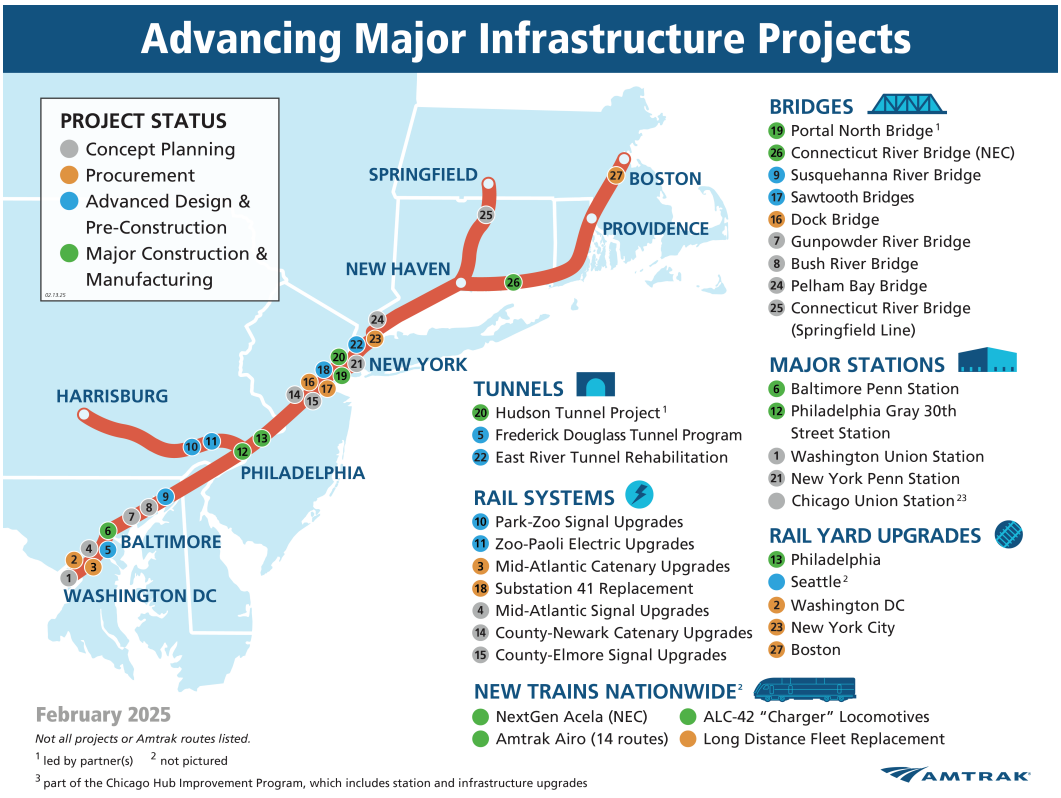
Texas Central Partners, LLC (TCP), was founded in 2013 to plan, design, build and operate a high-speed rail service between Dallas and Houston, one of the five high-speed rail corridors named in the ISTEA era studies. The rail line itself would be owned by the separate Texas Central Railway (TCR). Texas Central Partners secured $75 million of private funding to develop the EIS required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

FRA published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare the EIS in the Federal Register on June 25, 2014. The environmental and social impacts of various alternative high-speed rail route alignments were analyzed including possible routes that share corridors with an existing rail line and along electric utility lines. TCR's proposed high-speed rail line would run on a dedicated right-of-way with no grade crossings at speeds up to 205 mph and would not share track or infrastructure with existing trains or rail lines. In addition, the EIS analyzed the potential impacts of stations, power or fueling stations, and maintenance facilities to support high-speed rail operations.

On September 10, 2020, FRA issued the Record of Decision and Rule of Particular Applicability (RPA) that established safety standards for the TCR high-speed rail system. The final rule is not intended for widespread application in the railroad industry but applies only to the TCR system. The TCR rolling stock, track, and core systems will replicate the Tokaido Shinkansen system used by the Central Japan Railway Company. FRA's Record of Decision (ROD) for the Dallas to Houston Final EIS is contained in the final rule. It took six years to complete the environmental review process.

TCR encountered significant opposition from local communities and landowners who opposed the building of the high-speed rail through their land. The right-of-way needed to be bought by TCR for the rail line was significant. Ranchers living along the proposed route challenged TCR's attempts to survey and construct the line questioning their right to eminent domain. A series of legal challenges ensued. On July 16, 2020, the Surface Transportation Board ruled that TCR is part of the interstate rail network based on its through-ticketing with Amtrak, and therefore subject to the STB's jurisdiction. In June 2022, the Supreme Court of Texas ruled 5–3 that TCR was a railroad and an electric interurban railway under Texas law and has eminent domain authority on land that is needed to build the rail line. But by then, private funding of the project dissipated, and the project was suspended.

In 2023, Amtrak announced that they were exploring a potential partnership with TCR and would become the program manager reinvigorating and reviving the project. In 2024, Amtrak applied to enter the project into the FRA Corridor ID program and completed a Service Development Plan. Amtrak was awarded a $64 million Corridor ID Project Development grant to continue planning the Texas high-speed rail line. However, the FRA canceled the grant on April 1, 2025, based on a shift in the current Administration's priorities and by agreement between Amtrak and FRA. In a statement, the Fort Worth-based investment group Kleinheinz Capital Partners said the private venture capital company has stepped in as the "private sector sponsor" of the "shovel-ready" project.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW US

ART GUZZETTI

Vice President - Mobility Initiatives & Public Policy

Art is responsible for APTA's extensive policy development and research agenda, and for advancing policies favorable to public transportation with Congress, the Administration, state and local governments, with grassroots and stakeholder organizations, and with public policy think tanks. A key current focus is integration of transit networks with new and emerging public and private mobility services, including high-speed and intercity passenger rail.

JENNELISE HAFEN

Senior Program Manager - Mobility, Access, State & Local Affairs Policy

Jenn facilitates planning of the yearly Capital Projects session at the APTA Rail Conference. She is the staff liaison to the APTA High-Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail Committee (HS&IPR). In this capacity she assists with setting up committee meetings, reviewing articles that appear in Passenger Transport and SPEEDLINES. This year, she contributed to the planning of the High-Speed Rail Seminar.

WARD MCCARRAGHER

Vice President - Government Affairs & Advocacy

Ward leads APTA's advocacy initiatives regarding Federal legislative matters that impact the public transport sector. He coordinates industry activities related to the Federal budget, the yearly appropriations process, multi-year surface transportation authorization legislation, and issues related to security, tax, energy, and environmental laws that influence public transit and passenger rail, including high-speed rail.

BENJI SCHWARTZ

Director - Government Affairs & Advocacy

Benji covers APTA's commuter, intercity, and high-speed rail policy for the Government Affairs and Advocacy Team. In this role, he reviews important legislation from individual Members of Congress and assesses significant bills, such as annual appropriations legislation, for policies relevant to rail. He provides support to APTA's Commuter and Intercity Passenger Rail Legislative Subcommittee, and serves as a liaison between the Government Affairs team and the High-Speed Rail Committee.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL SNIPPETS

CASCADIA

The Cascadia area, centered around Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, and Portland, is a genuine mega-region. It boasts an unparalleled ecosystem in terms of beauty, its closeness to Asian and Pacific markets, and cutting-edge innovation across key economic fields.

The anticipated growth for Cascadia is alarming. Experts predict that by 2050, almost 4 million additional individuals will relocate to this area. If we don't take immediate action to support this expansion, existing issues such as traffic jams, the affordability of housing, and worsening climate change will only intensify.

For over five years, a diverse group of stakeholders—including the provinces of British Columbia and the states of Oregon and Washington—has been working together to envision ultra-high-speed ground transportation in Cascadia. Washington state has pledged funding to match federal finances. Federal investment is crucial to turn this vision into reality and serve as a model for developing high-speed rail corridors in other regions across the nation. Cascadia has taken essential initial steps, but it requires support from both state and federal levels.

There is an urgent need to act quickly and adopt bold ideas that will help prepare for ongoing growth. Ultra-high-speed rail could be part of this solution. By establishing better connections between the main cities of Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, and Portland, along with the surrounding areas, innovation, shared prosperity, and job opportunities will increase, helping the region maintain its exceptional quality of life for future generations.

HIGH DESERT CORRIDOR

HDR will offer engineering, design, and consulting services for the intercity passenger rail project of the High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency (JPA), which aims to connect Palmdale and Victorville, California.

Spanning 54 miles, this rail corridor will enhance links with California's proposed high-speed rail system and will create access to housing, employment, and cultural experiences that were previously difficult to reach. With anticipated speeds reaching 180 miles per hour, this service will establish a quick route from a multimodal transit hub in Los Angeles County's Antelope Valley to the forthcoming Brightline West high-speed rail station in San Bernardino County. Ultimately, the rail network is expected to link Southern California to the northern regions of the state, Las Vegas, and beyond.

BECHTEL

HIGH-SPEED RAIL REPORT, MAY 2025

Utilizing Bechtel's vast experience with major international projects and effective rail delivery techniques from Asia and Europe, the document titled "High-Speed Rail in the U.S. The Mega Project Delivery Perspective," highlights essential factors, necessary reforms, and a contemporary delivery strategy customized for the U.S. market.

By employing the right strategies, we can enhance opportunities for American workers, promote regional growth, and draw private funding—while also ensuring a quicker, safer, and more environmentally-friendly travel options.

View and Download here: HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN THE U.S., THE MEGA PROJECT DELIVERY PERSPECTIVE

AMTRAK LONG-DISTANCE SERVICE STUDY

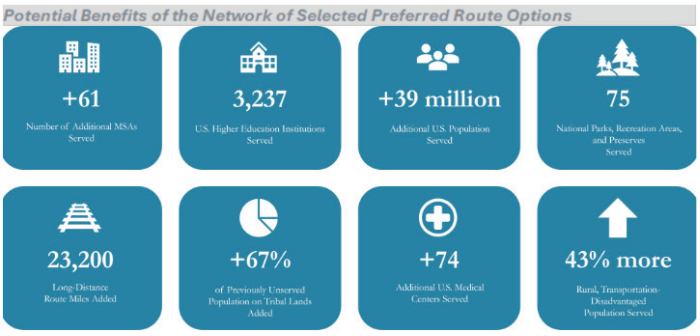
...A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

Contributed by: FRA, Speedlines Staff [reprint]

Amtrak operates 15 long-distance passenger rail routes, which are defined in statute as routes over 750 miles. Long-distance routes provide service at nearly half of the train stations in the Amtrak system. These routes typically operate once per day in each direction, linking and serving large and small communities across the country – although two long-distance routes (the Cardinal and Sunset Limited) only operate three times per week. Due to the length of these routes, some stations are only served at night. Long-distance routes, despite relatively low service frequencies, form an essential backbone of the national passenger rail network across 39 states and the District of Columbia, connecting passengers to shorter state-supported Amtrak routes, Amtrak Northeast Corridor routes, Amtrak Thruway bus services, and other local and regional transportation options. In fiscal year 2024, long-distance trains carried more than 4.2 million passengers.

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE

Section 22214 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) directed the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to conduct an Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity rail passenger service along (1) any Amtrak long-distance routes that, as of the date of enactment of IIJA, were discontinued, and (2) any Amtrak long-distance routes that, as of the date of enactment of IIJA, occur on a non-daily basis.



The legislation stated that the FRA may also evaluate potential new Amtrak long-distance routes, with specific attention provided to routes in service as of April 1971 but not continued by Amtrak. For potential new routes, IIJA directed FRA to consider whether new Amtrak long-distance routes would:

- link and serve large and small communities as part of a regional rail network,
- advance the economic and social well-being of rural areas of the United States,
- provide enhanced connectivity to the national long-distance passenger rail system,
- and reflect public engagement and local and regional support for restored passenger rail service.

FRA used these considerations to guide the Study's analyses and select preferred route options for long-distance service restoration, enhancement, and expansion.

FRA worked on the Study from 2022 to 2024, completing the required analyses for the Study and conducting 24 regional working group meetings with stakeholders in 21 cities across the country. The Study received over 50,000 stakeholder and public comments that indicated overwhelming support for long-distance services or passenger rail in general. FRA was supported by a consultant team consisting of AECOM, Jacobs, R. L. Banks and Associates, and DB E.C.O. North America.

Based on IIJA requirements, the Study focused solely on new or restored Amtrak long-distance services and daily service on the two Amtrak long-distance routes that currently operate with less than daily frequencies (Cardinal and Sunset Limited). It does not include recommendations for restoration or enhancement of state-supported service, the Northeast Corridor (NEC), high-speed rail, or other types of passenger rail

service. Beyond the required analyses of the Cardinal and Sunset Limited, this study did not consider service changes to existing Amtrak long-distance routes.

STUDY RESULTS

The Long-Distance Study Final Report creates a foundation for further planning of potential future long-distance services by developing or identifying:

- Selected preferred route options for service restoration, enhancement, or expansion.
- A prioritized inventory of certain capital project types.
- Estimated costs and public benefits.
- Recommendations for methods by which Amtrak could work with local communities and organizations to develop activities and programs to improve public use of intercity passenger rail service along each route continuously.
- Potential federal and non-federal funding sources.

The selected preferred route options reflect current travel demand, as well as opportunities to: increase passenger rail access to rural areas and transportation-disadvantaged communities; increase connectivity with existing and future passenger rail services; consider the impacts of previously discontinued long-distance passenger rail service; and address significant stakeholder input. The Final Report includes preferred options for daily passenger rail service on the Cardinal and Sunset Limited routes, as directed by IIJA.

The network of selected preferred route options, if implemented, could provide passenger rail access to 39 million people that don't currently have access to passenger rail, including 7 million people in rural communities. The network of selected preferred route options, which could serve 34 states, could also increase access to key destinations.

FRA received comments from people across the country who would use these route options to visit family, connect to higher education and job opportunities, get medical treatment, see national parks, and travel to and from military bases and installations. Travelers with disabilities, travelers who are unable to drive, and travelers who are concerned about affordability also submitted comments supporting the network of selected preferred route options.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE NETWORK

The Final Report also recommended consideration of a new long-distance committee made up of key stakeholders from across the country (including host railroads, states and communities served by Amtrak long-distance routes, Amtrak, and FRA) that could serve as a forum for feedback and discussion related to current Amtrak long-distance service.

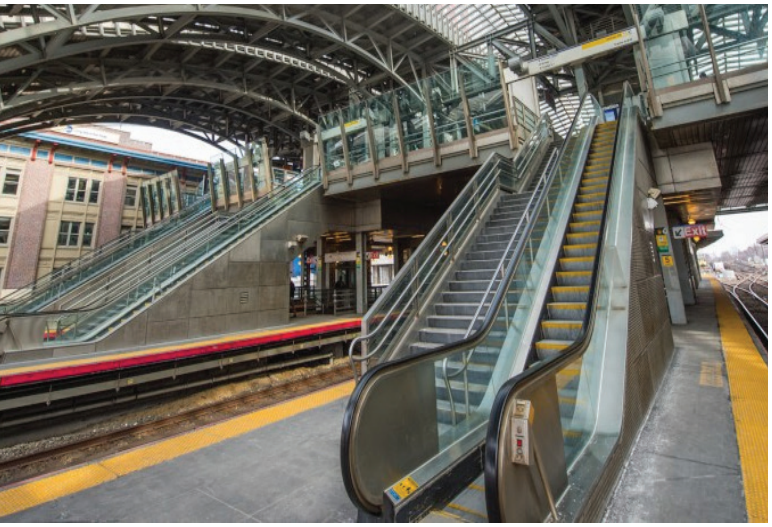
NEXT STEPS

This Study is a crucial early step in a comprehensive process to identify the actions that may be needed to enhance long-distance service, and reflects FRA's diligent work to meet Congressional requirements, as well as significant stakeholder input. The selected preferred route options identified in this Study are conceptual – they are not final recommendations for service, and would require additional review, resources, and stakeholder collaboration after this study is complete to refine projects, costs, funding sources, and other key items needed for implementation. These additional analyses may identify different alignments and variations of the selected preferred route options.

The Final Report recognizes the significant challenges in implementing the selected preferred route options, including – but not limited to – funding and governance of Amtrak long-distance service. Currently, there is no sustained financial support or program to construct or operate the selected preferred route options identified in the Final Report, although some of them may be eligible for additional planning funds through FRA's Corridor Identification and Development Program, which is described in the States Roundup article in this Issue.

AMTRAK NEWS CLIPPINGS

ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY:
AMTRAK SERVICES TO QUEENS AND LONG ISLAND - NEW YORK



The proposed expansion of Amtrak services into Long Island (NY), culminating in a new stop in Queens, represents a transformative shift in intercity travel within Northeast America. This initiative underscores Amtrak's commitment to enhancing accessibility and connectivity in the densely populated and economically vibrant region. By introducing three daily round-trip trains that traverse both Amtrak's Northeast Corridor and the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) tracks, this expansion aims to streamline travel options for millions of residents and visitors alike.

Transportation within the Northeast has been characterized by a multitude of options, including regional trains, subways, and buses. However, the integration of Amtrak into the Long Island Rail network is poised to reshape this landscape.

With proposed stops at Jamaica, Hicksville, and Ronkonkoma, travelers could benefit from a seamless transition between local services and intercity travel. This would not only reduce travel times but also increase convenience for commuters heading to key destinations, such as New York City and beyond.

Queens, as Amtrak's second official stop in New York City after Penn Station, plays a vital role in this initiative. The borough's diverse population and its status as a critical transportation hub highlight the importance of expanding rail services in the area. The integration of Amtrak services will not only serve local residents but also tap into a broader market of intercity travelers, who may prefer rail over congested roadways or airports. This proposition aims to alleviate traffic congestion while promoting sustainable travel options.

This expansion could have significant economic implications. Improved rail access might stimulate growth in various sectors, including tourism, hospitality, and local businesses. The convenience of rail travel could attract visitors to Long Island's beaches, parks, and cultural attractions, simultaneously strengthening the local economy. In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on sustainable infrastructure, and enhancing rail networks aligns with societal goals of reducing dependence on fossil fuels while promoting efficient mass transit.

As plans continue to unfold, stakeholders must prioritize collaboration and communication to ensure that the implementation of these services meets the needs of the diverse communities in the region. The future of rail travel in the Northeast looks promising, with the potential to foster deeper connections and invigorate local economies.

The recent proposal by Amtrak officials to extend train services to Long Island represents a significant opportunity for enhanced connectivity for its 5.4 million residents. For the first time in over 80 years, this extension offers an alternative rail option, promising to facilitate access to other cities and vital transportation hubs, including JFK Airport and Islip MacArthur Airport. The proposal is not just a logistical enhancement; it is a transformative approach to urban mobility and economic development in the region.

Historically, residents of Long Island have faced challenges accessing rapid transit options that connect them to major urban centers and airports. The proposed Amtrak extension could alleviate these issues by providing a more efficient transport system. Besides Amtrak, MTA has approved purchase of M-9A rail cars, which will include USB charging ports, and better accessibility — with the first units anticipated to begin operating in 2030. This would mean fewer residents depending solely on their cars, which could result in less traffic congestion and reduced environmental effects

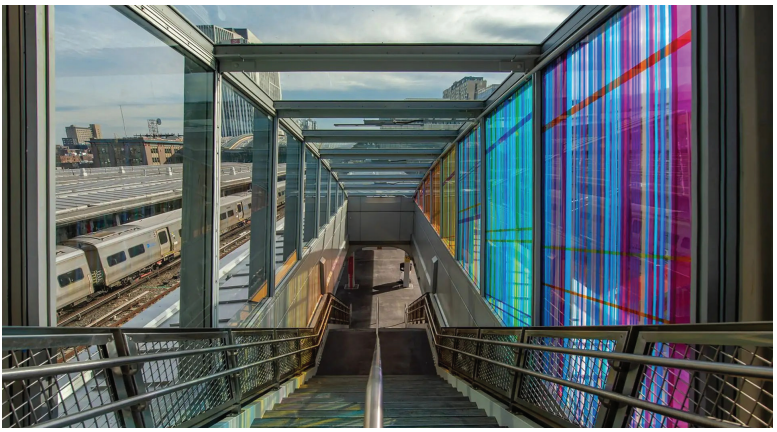
(Rendering Courtesy of NYMTA)

due to lower emissions. Additionally, enhancing airport access through this extension would greatly benefit both business and vacation travelers, thereby promoting economic growth in the region.

In addition to benefiting commuters directly, the extension aligns with contemporary trends in urban planning, which increasingly advocate for integrated and sustainable transportation solutions. In recent years, cities across the globe have invested in rail infrastructure as part of long-term strategies to enhance mobility, reduce urban sprawl, and promote public transit usage. If Long Island adopts a similar approach, it could set a precedent for future transit initiatives, ultimately improving the quality of life for its residents.

The extension would cater to long-standing commuter patterns from New Jersey residents, offering them easier access to JFK Airport via the AirTrain at Jamaica. The emphasis on intermodal connections is crucial for maximizing the efficiency of the transportation network and meeting the demands of passengers who frequently travel between states.

The proposed Amtrak rail extension signifies a pivotal development for Long Island's residents. It promises to provide an essential link to urban centers and airports, ultimately enhancing connectivity, promoting economic growth, and contributing to a more sustainable transit system. As this proposal progresses through its study phases, it presents an invaluable opportunity for stakeholders to advocate for a brighter commuting future for the serving communities.



NORTHEAST CORRIDOR (NEC) AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

The 2026 budget proposal for the federal Department of Transportation plans to transfer $291 million from the struggling Northeast Corridor, which has been facing infrastructure issues and problems with NJ Transit trains. This corridor was notably impacted by service disruptions during the summer of 2024. Amtrak has requested $850 million for Northeast Corridor grants, which is less than the $1.141 billion allocated in 2025. The budget will shift funds to provide $1.577 billion for grants related to the Amtrak National Network.

The Biden administration's infrastructure legislation from 2021, which secures $4.4 billion in funding, will maintain its commitment, including $1.2 billion for the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak has agreed to undertake both urgent and long-term repair projects in the region, responding to significant infrastructure challenges and previous service delays. An additional $40 million will be used for upgrades targeting high-traffic areas. Kris Kolluri, the CEO of NJ Transit, mentioned ongoing discussions among members of the Northeast Corridor Commission about these changes to funding.

Kolluri raised concerns about reallocating uncommitted funds for urgent projects while awaiting Congressional approval. U. S. Rep. Frank Pallone highlighted the need to keep funding for infrastructure improvements to ensure stability in solving past problems. Amtrak officials mentioned a rise in funds for capital projects in the NEC, with plans to spend over $4 billion this year, a significant increase from previous years.

In the current fiscal year, Amtrak has already spent $1. 37 billion, with total expected expenditures of about $3. 5 billion, up from $2.155 billion the previous year. They anticipate generating $2.102 billion in revenue by 2026, based on ridership exceeding pre-pandemic levels. Last year, 14 million people used the Northeast Corridor, with projections of 16 million by 2026. Issues like heat affecting overhead wires and outdated signal systems have contributed to service delays, along with problems in NJ Transit's aging fleet.

On July 27, 2024, Amtrak and NJ Transit announced a partnership to tackle service disruptions from 2023. NJ Transit trains face scrutiny for possible equipment defects that may cause more interruptions. Ongoing efforts focus on obtaining parts to keep older trains running until new ones arrive in 2031. Over 2,000 defects in overhead wiring have been fixed, and significant upgrades have been made since last summer.

SPECIAL REPORT ON INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

PASSENGER RAIL RENAISSANCE

Contributed by: HSIPR Task Force on Reauthorization

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has consistently advocated for transportation investments to be the foundation of a forward-looking strategy to establish safe, reliable, efficient, integrated public transportation systems for moving people. We have studied and learned from international success stories that building a high-performance passenger rail network will better position the country to compete in the global marketplace in the coming years. For the past 65 years, Americans have relied overwhelmingly on highways and airlines for travel between regions. Passenger rail has been underfunded and therefore underutilized in comparison. It is ripe to be renewed to complement these other networks with high quality intercity services linking rural areas and cities 300-600 miles apart, while connecting with local transit networks to start and complete journeys. These services will relieve congestion on highways and airspace and provide efficient, welcoming and competitive mobility options.

LASTING LEGACIES

Congress has the Constitutional power to establish roads to promote interstate commerce, to charter private corporations for that purpose, and to vest those corporations with the power of eminent domain. Congress has used this power to build roads and railroads that connected the country. In 1862, Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act, which authorized and enabled the construction of the first transcontinental railroad in the United States by private corporations. The Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 1, 1862. The transcontinental railroad reduced a journey of four months or more to just one week and spawned both one of the largest economic booms in US history and a nationwide transportation network that united the country by railroad. For over 100 years, Americans relied heavily on passenger trains to travel between cities.

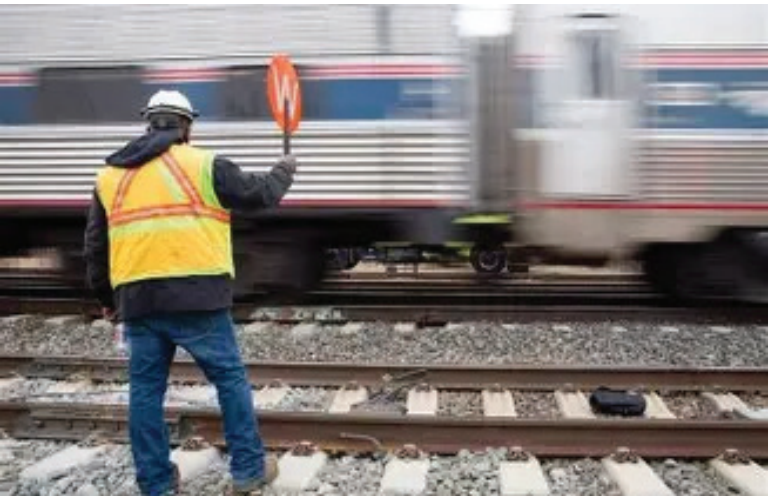
After World War II, to take advantage of newer technologies and to drive economic growth, Congress passed several acts to reshape the transportation landscape in America. First, Congress passed the Federal Airport Act of 1946 (PL 79-377), which authorized the federal government to pay half the cost of building public airports. Then ten years later Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, also known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, which established the interstate highway system. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill into law on June 29, 1956. The federal government paid 80 percent of the cost of building interstate highways. Both programs are now funded by trust funds.

The Highway Trust Fund (HTF), established in 1956, is a dedicated fund that receives revenue from federal fuel taxes and is primarily used to finance federal highway and mass transit programs. The Airport and Airway Revenue Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-258) created the Airport and Airway Trust Fund (AATF) to provide a dedicated

source of funding for the US aviation system. The General Fund often subsidizes both the HTF and AATF with annual appropriations.

By the mid-1960s advances in aviation and the construction of the interstate highway system transformed how people traveled between cities. As a result, ridership on passenger trains declined. By 1970, the railroads sought relief from their common carrier obligations of carrying passengers. Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 establishing the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), which operates intercity passenger trains in the United States. Congress passed the Act to ensure the continuation of passenger train service in response to the bankruptcy of several major Class I railroads. President Nixon signed it into law. In exchange, railroads were obligated to provide access to their rail network and priority for passenger trains.

Congress has continued to fund Amtrak since then and created programs designed to renew and replace railroad infrastructure in support of continuing and improving passenger rail service. The federal funding programs administered by the Federal Railroad Administration



RENAISSANCE – REDISCOVERING THE VALUE OF PASSENGER RAIL

(FRA) are well designed and rigorously structured to assure passenger rail improvement projects are in the national interest.

Intercity passenger rail has been enjoying a renaissance. Ridership has been steadily increasing as more people have found renewed interest in this mode of travel. In fact, Amtrak carried more passengers in 2024 than at any other time in its history, surpassing pre-pandemic ridership levels. People find traveling by train more relaxing than driving or flying and a more productive use of their travel time. In recognition of this, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58) in 2021, which included the "Rail Title." Through the Rail Title, the IIJA provided record levels of funding to support the revival, renewal and expansion of passenger rail service across the country over its five-year life.

The appropriations from the IIJA are being put to work. Nearly $53 billion of the $66 billion that was appropriated has been invested across 594 projects. These projects will improve rail safety, expand or improve passenger rail travel in 48 states and increase freight rail network capacity to support passenger rail. Construction companies are laying tracks, boring tunnels, and replacing 100-year-old bridges. Rolling stock manufacturers have invested billions of private sector capital to upgrade their U.S. facilities to produce state-of-the-art railcars and locomotives. Companies up and down the supply chain are busy producing ties, ballast, signaling equipment, and forging and welding steel into bridge trusses and new rail. The IIJA is employing hard-working Americans and bringing prosperity to towns and cities across the country. Communities are building new stations and seeing dormant real estate adjacent to the stations revitalized.

The renaissance in passenger rail has renewed the interest of the private sector in operating passenger trains. Unlike 55 years ago, many private-sector companies are now competing for and operating passenger trains. Four companies, Herzog, Keolis, Transdev and RATPdev compete fiercely against each other, mostly in the public transportation market under contract to public transportation agencies/authorities. They operate everything from streetcars to commuter rail to intercity passenger rail. In 2023, these companies carried 65.5 million passengers by rail in the US and 2.6 billion passengers worldwide.

Simply ending subsidies and privatizing Amtrak while eliminating the FRA passenger rail programs would certainly spell the end of most intercity passenger service in the country. Passenger rail would be limited to only those corridors that generate operating profit. Rural communities would become disconnected to a national public transportation network and lose a valuable transportation choice. We need a balanced and integrated approach to transportation investment. It is also unlikely that a project can be fully funded by private investment. The transcontinental railroad was funded through a combination of federal government bonds, land grants to railroad companies, and private investment.

There are other ways to engage the private sector in a meaningful way. Brightline provides an excellent example of a good reform path forward, but not the only

path. Brightline has reintroduced private passenger trains in Florida on tracks it owns and controls. In 2024 Brightline carried nearly 3 million passengers on its route between Miami and Orlando International Airport. They built the Florida passenger rail line using a combination of federal grants, private investment, and local partnerships. Brightline obtained $5.35 billion in private investment, involving investment grade rated, tax-exempt private activity bonds (PABs), a senior secured revolving credit facility, and taxable high-yield senior secured notes. Brightline is planning to expand its Florida service to Tampa. Brightline West is constructing a 218-mile high-speed rail line between Las Vegas and Rancho Cucamonga in Southern California and is estimating it will carry 8.6 million customers by 2031.

RECONNECTING RURAL AMERICA

FRA was tasked to prepare the Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study in Section 22214 of the IIJA. Long-distance passenger rail service is defined by statute as routes of more than 750 miles between endpoints operated by Amtrak (49 U.S.C. Section 24102(5)) and is funded through passenger fares and annual subsidies appropriated by Congress. The Study evaluated the restoration of daily intercity rail passenger service along Amtrak long-distance routes that occur on a non-daily basis or were discontinued by Amtrak.

The legislation directed FRA to evaluate potential new Amtrak long-distance routes, with specific attention to routes in service as of April 1971 but not continued by Amtrak. For potential new routes, the legislation directed FRA to consider whether new routes connect

large and small communities, advance the well-being of rural areas, enhance connectivity, and reflect public engagement and support for restored passenger rail service. The FRA issued its Final Report to Congress in January 2025. The Long-Distance Study Final Report created a foundation for further planning of potential future long-distance services by developing or identifying selected preferred route options for service restoration, enhancement, or expansion.

REKINDLING PARTNERSHIPS

Brightline is a good example of a partnership structure that could be used for passenger rail development across the country. The key is private initiative and a mix of public and private financing including transportation-oriented development to generate revenue.

A reliable, stable and sustainable source of federal

funding supplemented by state and local funding for infrastructure support, as in the Highway and Aviation programs, is necessary. State roles should be strengthened to manage operations on the state-supported routes, which include 30 routes currently in operation and 69 new corridor projects proposed across 44 states. As in the current law, the subsidies on these routes are provided by the states. Competition for operation of these state supported services should be introduced where possible.

The long-distance routes, as part of the national network, would continue to be supported by fares and annual subsidies from Congress as needed. Reform must also include regulatory relief to accelerate projects to completion generating predicted benefits. There is a continuing need for committed stable, reliable and sustainable federal funding support. Then the existing foundation of the competitive American supply chain companies and competitive private passenger rail operators could lead us into a new golden age of passenger railroading—again!

REVIVING OVERNIGHT TRAINS

Brightline is not the only example of revived private sector interest in intercity passenger rail. The revival of overnight train service in Europe has caught the attention of private investors in the US. Dreamstar Lines is a private company examining the feasibility of reviving night train service between San Francisco and Los Angeles following the trend in Europe of resurrecting overnight travel between major cities. Under Dreamstar's current proposal, trains would run every night in each direction, departing from each terminus at 10:00 p.m. and arriving at their destination the next day at 8:30 a.m. This schedule is like the red-eye travel used in commercial flying, but more comfortable using sleeping cars. Onboard amenities include two sleeping arrangements; private rooms with lie-flat beds and premium bedrooms; a lounge with open seating and bar, as well as breakfast delivery. Another company also has expressed renewed interest in reviving overnight train travel in the US. Lunatrain, which describes itself as "a private, early-stage company," says it will develop a network of express, non-stop night trains in the Midwest and on the East Coast to connect cities "that are too far for daytime trains to serve effectively." Lunatrain plans to focus on single-night journeys. Access to the railroad network is critically important for these potential intercity overnight travel options.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Jobs: Investment in new passenger train equipment and services is creating jobs. The manufacturing sector is being rejuvenated as new plants spring up to meet the demand for new trainsets replacing equipment that has reached the end of its economic service life. There are over 680,000 people employed in the rail manufacturing supply chain in the United States. In addition, there are thousands more in rail construction. Brightline created over 10,000 jobs building the Orlando – Miami rail line in Florida and expects to support over 35,000 jobs during construction of the Brightline West high-speed rail line between Las Vegas and Rancho Cucamonga, including more than 10,000 direct field jobs. Moreover, there are many people employed operating passenger trains. Amtrak has over 20,000 employees and Brightline employs over 1,000 people in Florida. Thousands more are employed servicing the trains and supplying commissary items for food and beverage service on-board trains.

Efficiency: Trains can carry more people than airplanes. Passenger trains are about six times more energy efficient than airplanes and 45 percent more energy efficient than driving. Traveling on trains helps people become more productive while traveling. Train travel can often be more time-efficient when considering total journey time on trips between 300 – 600 miles.

Mobility: Americans who do not drive have no freedom to travel; 100 million Americans fall into this category. Intercity passenger rail provides this freedom and connects small towns in America to the rest of the country. The travel market it serves falls in between those trips that are too short to fly and too long to drive. It improves mobility for people who don't like or cannot

afford to fly or drive. This includes veterans, people who do not own a car, senior citizens and students traveling to colleges and universities distant from their homes.

Traffic congestion is stifling in urban areas and megaregion corridors, limiting their economic output and growth potential. Rather than sit in traffic unproductively, people are switching to traveling by train in those parts of the country that have invested in improved passenger rail. This includes corridors in California, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. On the train, people can logon to the internet and catch up on e-mail and news. Or they can just relax traveling stress free or walk to a dining/cafe car for a meal or snack.

Population growth: In many corridors, the cost of trying to accommodate population and economic growth with only roads/highways and airways alone vastly outweighs the cost of building high-performance passenger rail. Virginia concluded it was cheaper and more cost effective to invest in passenger rail than to widen I-95. Other states are coming to the same conclusion.

Economic development and revitalization: Stations served by fast, frequent and reliable passenger trains are hubs of activity, generating all sorts of business opportunities. The activity near stations allows communities to redevelop long dormant property near stations, often in the center city.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Wider economic benefits: While even the best-designed and best-run rail system may not generate an operating profit on passenger revenues alone, the potential they unlock for jobs, commerce, tourism, and tax revenue generation is what makes them good investments. Investing in passenger rail yields significant economic returns, creating jobs and boosting economic activity, with studies suggesting a potential 5-to-1 economic return for every dollar invested. Like a robust highway system, a robust passenger rail system is a precondition for economic activity, not necessarily a profit generator in and of itself. One analysis from APTA suggests that every $1 billion invested in high-speed and intercity passenger rail can create 24,000 jobs across various sectors. Another study from the Mineta Transportation Institute states that every $1 billion invested in rail can create 20,000 new jobs.

Safety and health benefits: Riding trains is safer than riding in cars. Every person riding in a train is one less person traveling on a road in a car. Consequently, there is a reduction in car crashes as people divert from driving to riding trains reducing injuries and saving lives. Reducing automobile usage also lowers emissions. Lowering emissions has significant health benefits, primarily through improved air quality, leading to reduced respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular problems, and potentially, even some cancers.

Environmental benefits: A Center for Neighborhood Technology study found that high-speed trains around the world emit somewhere between 0.1 and 0.3 pounds of carbon dioxide per passenger mile, while airplanes emit more than 0.6 pounds and cars more than 0.5 pounds of carbon dioxide per passenger mile.

Benefit/cost analysis: Investments in passenger rail are required to be analyzed following rigorous benefit/cost analysis in accordance with FRA guidance for project assessments. The the new Borealis train operating between Chicago and the Twin Cities was projected to generate $47.7 million in regional economic benefits, which is a 7-1 return on investment. Economic impact studies of the Ohio 3C+D Corridor (Cincinnati – Dayton – Columbus – Cleveland) estimated an annual economic impact of $130 million with $2.6 billion in economic activity from capital investment.

The Denver Union Station redevelopment project transformed a 50-acre former rail yard into a vibrant urban center with mixed-use developments attracting $500 million in private investment and revitalizing Denver's Lower Downtown. The transportation hub connects Amtrak, commuter rail, light rail and regularly scheduled bus service, and other related transportation services.

REAUTHORIZATION

As discussions for reauthorization of surface transportation funding comes into focus this year, it is important to reflect on the successes of prior surface transportation bills and notably the positive impact it is having on the renewal, revitalization and continued redevelopment of an expanded intercity passenger rail network. As highlighted above, high-speed and intercity passenger rail projects support economic development, improve mobility and expand access to economic and educational opportunities and specialized health care delivery services in larger urban areas from rural communities. An expanded passenger rail system creates jobs in the rail industry and related sectors like manufacturing and tourism. Passenger rail can reduce traffic on roads and improve safety by diverting people from driving cars to riding on trains.

Train travel allows passengers to be productive while traveling. Or people can simply sit back, relax, eat, or drink while viewing the American countryside pass-by at ground level without having to navigate interstate highways choked by congestion and heavy volumes of truck traffic or delayed by airplanes stuck on congested runways or grounded due to inclement weather.

Funding - Compared to other countries, American intercity passenger service is poor. This is primarily due to the nation's overwhelming focus on highway and aviation infrastructure investment, which resulted in the underinvestment of passenger rail. Since its creation in 1970, Amtrak has received nearly $66 billion in federal assistance. In comparison, the FHWA budget for highway assistance in FY 2024 alone was $62 billion. The FAA annual budget for FY 2024 was $24.8 billion. The airlines received $59 billion in COVID relief funding and an additional $17 billion in loans in 2021 and $5 billion in aid after the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, DC.

It is time for the passenger rail network to be rebuilt.

Colorado - West of Tunnel 1, the morning California Zephyr

Italy has transformed its passenger rail market by opening it up to competition on select routes. Competition between the state-owned Trenitalia and the private company Italo (NTV), has led to improved service quality and competitive prices. The competition has also resulted in an increase in service frequency and capacity, making travel more convenient for passengers. Rete Ferroviaria Italiana (RFI) manages the railway infrastructure and is owned by Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FS), which owns and controls most of the Italian rail network, including Trenitalia.

A new kind of public/private cooperative effort emphasizing market-based enterprise and rigorous cost/benefit analysis of all transportation projects needs to be put in place. Only then will America achieve a balanced transportation system that can achieve the economic benefits listed above. But to accomplish this, we need a stable, predictable, reliable and sustainable source of federal funding to support investment in the renewal of intercity passenger rail as part of an integrated network of public transportation services designed to improve mobility and provide people with viable travel option choices. Intercity passenger rail needs to have a trust fund like the highway and airway trust funds that support investment for those modes of transportation.

Regulations - In addition to stable, predictable funding, there is a need for regulatory relief and streamlining of

Spain leads Europe in the total number of high-speed rail routes. Besides Iryo, the Spanish high-speed rail market includes two other players: the national railway Renfe and the budget-friendly French firm Ouigo.

the environmental review and approval processes. It takes too long to complete the necessary environmental compliance and permitting process adding to the cost of projects due to inflationary pressures caused by administrative delay.

Access - Currently, only Amtrak has the statutory right to force access on to the general railroad system owned and maintained by the Class 1, regional and short line railroads. Access to freight railroad rights-of-way is a significant issue to ensure effective implementation of a competitive rail program. Appropriate incentives need to be provided to host railroads with the expectation that they will accommodate the public purpose of convenience and necessity by facilitating growth of passenger rail. Federal policies must encourage growth of both passenger and freight rail operations, recognizing the substantive public benefits to both networks.

MAKING PASSENGER RAIL GREAT AGAIN

Japan celebrated the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Tokaido Shinkansen high-speed rail line with a commemorative ceremony at Tokyo Station on October 1, 2024. Many people in the United States were left wondering why we don't have such trains, including President Donald J. Trump.

Sadly, the United States has fallen behind European, African and Asian passenger rail development, which began blossoming following the success of the Tokaido Shinkansen in Japan in 1964.

In France, the state-owned Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Français (SNCF) began working on its first Train à Grande Vitesse (TGV) high-speed rail line in 1966. After ten years of planning and design, SNCF purchased 87 high-speed trainsets from Alstom in 1976. TGV service between Paris and Lyon was inaugurated in 1981, only 15 years after initial studies. The Paris – Lyon TGV Sud-Est line was a major success for SNCF, and the TGV network continued to expand throughout France. Today, over forty years after the first TGV line, France has built or upgraded 1,700 miles (2,735 km) of rail lines across the country connecting Paris to many major French cities and other countries across Europe.

Spain opened its first high-speed rail line in 1992 connecting the cities of Madrid, Córdoba and Seville. Since then, the Spanish network has grown considerably linking most of its major cities and becoming the longest high-speed rail system in Europe encompassing a network over 2,469 miles (3,973 km). It is the second longest high-speed rail network in the world, only after China's.

China's network is extraordinary. Planning for China's

Southeastern Hitachi A Train Class 395 'Javelin' pictured departing London St Pancras International.

current high-speed rail network began in 1994 with a feasibility study for the Beijing - Shanghai high-speed rail line. By 2008, the first high-speed rail line was inaugurated between Beijing and Tianjin. Since then, the total length of China's high-speed rail network has grown to over 28,500 miles (approximately 46,000 km) of dedicated high-speed rail lines.

Other countries have developed high-speed rail lines in high volume travel corridors to ease highway and air system congestion. These countries include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Kingdom. Vietnam recently announced plans to connect Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) with high-speed rail.

APTA concurs with President Trump's observation that it is illogical not to have fast, incredibly comfortable and reliable passenger trains here in America. APTA believe it is time to upgrade the intercity passenger rail system and incorporate it into a first-class integrated public transportation network. It is the only logical thing to do. Let's make passenger rail and transit great again!

TGV InOui, SNCF - Gare de Lyon Station, Paris, Île-de-France.

AN ODYSSEY THROUGH AMERICA'S PASSENGER RAIL TRANSFORMATION

Contributed by: HSIPR Task Force

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Congressional interest and support for intercity passenger rail began with the passage of the High-Speed Ground Transportation Act of 1965 (HSGT) immediately following the introduction of Shinkansen high-speed rail service in Japan in October 1964. In partnership with privately-owned railroads, experimental high-speed trains were funded and operated on the Northeast Corridor (NEC). See SPEEDLINES Issue 25; and SPEEDLINES Issue 26 for anniversary stories on the experimental Metroliners and Turbotrains.

Despite the experiments on the NEC, passenger train ridership continued to decline across the rest of the country; travelers were instead choosing to drive or fly. Between 1955 and 1972, airline passenger numbers more than quadrupled. In 1955, for the first time, more Americans traveled by air than by train. Domestic airline passenger traffic increased by 3.2 billion revenue passenger miles compared to 1954, while surface carrier figures decreased by 1.8 billion. Air travel was becoming more popular and accessible due to factors like the development of new, more efficient aircraft and a decline in travel time and fares, according to the National Air and Space Museum. The significant federal investment in the interstate highway system and airport construction was impacting the bottom line of the passenger railroads.

The privately-owned railroads had to reduce service and increase fares as federal investments were making it more affordable to drive or fly. The railroads operating passenger trains petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to eliminate its passenger services entirely.

As a result, Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970, which relieved private rail carriers of their common carrier obligation to provide passenger rail service and transferred it to a newly established National Passenger Rail Corporation (Amtrak).

The following sections discuss Congressional legislative enactments that foster improvements to the passenger rail network through investment in infrastructure.

INTERMODAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY ACT OF 1991

The renaissance of passenger rail began with the passage of the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). The act presented an overall intermodal approach to highway and public transportation funding. It listed "high priority" highway corridors and called for the designation of up to five high-speed rail corridors. The five high-speed rail corridors identified in ISTEA included:

- California corridor linking San Diego and Los Angeles with the Bay Area and Sacramento via the San Joaquin Valley.
- Florida corridor linking Miami with Orlando and Tampa.
- Midwest corridor linking Chicago with Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee.
- Pacific Northwest corridor linking Eugene and Portland with Seattle and Vancouver, BC, Canada.
- Southeast corridor connecting Charlotte, Richmond, and Washington, D.C.

Since then, much study has been devoted to these and other corridors. In 1997 the Congressionally mandated feasibility study, High-Speed Ground Transportation for America was published. The report was prepared by a team of consultants for the FRA to examine the economics of improved passenger rail service to highly populated corridors, linking cities throughout the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine the likely investment needs, operating performance, and economic benefits of high-performance passenger rail in a set of illustrative corridors. The report concluded that several corridors were ripe for high-speed rail development while several other corridors would be better served by investing in higher speed conventional services.

The recommended high-speed rail corridors were:

- California (San Francisco – Los Angeles)
- Northeast Corridor
  (Boston – New York – Washington, DC.)
- Texas (Dallas – Houston)

The Report also recommended high-performance conventional passenger rail for:

- Chicago Hub network
- Cascades Corridor (Pacific Northwest)
- Empire Corridor (New York)

Since the 1997 Congressional Feasibility Study was released, investments have been made in all ISTEA identified high speed and high-performance corridors. The California high-speed rail system is being designed and constructed to the 220-mph high-speed rail standard. Amtrak received funding to improve the Northeast Corridor (NEC) including upgrading the electrification between New Haven and Boston, purchasing the Acela trainsets and other infrastructure improvements to speed up the line and cut travel times. The Dallas – Houston Texas Central project is being planned for Shinkansen style trains that can operate at speeds up to 200-mph.

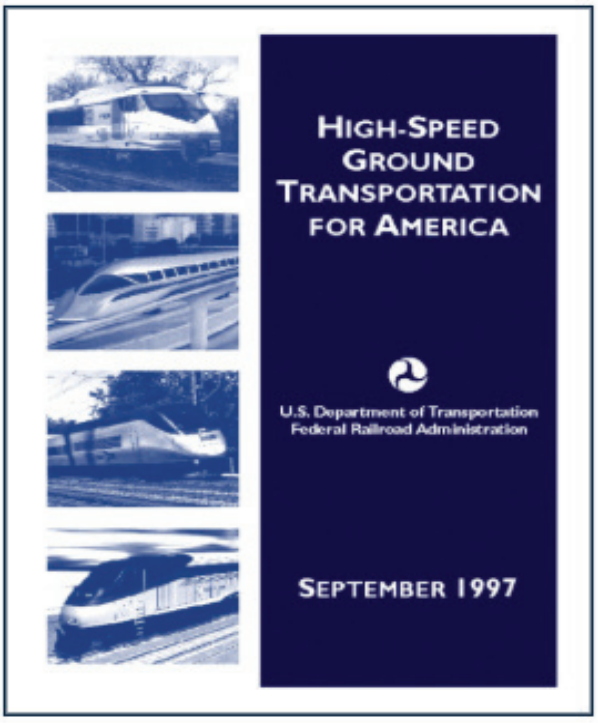
Several corridors received significant upgrades to increase maximum authorized speed from 79 mph up to 110 mph (175 km/h), reducing travel times making them competitive with driving cars.

These corridors are:

Albany – New York City (Empire Corridor)

Chicago – St. Louis (Lincoln Service)

CFS Report To Congress



This commercial feasibility study (CFS) report examined the economics of bringing high-speed ground transportation (HSGT) to well-populated groups of cities throughout the United States.

Chicago – Detroit (Wolverine Service)

Harrisburg – Philadelphia (Keystone Corridor)

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2008 (PRIIA)

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) created three new intercity rail capital assistance programs, reauthorized Amtrak and required further federal involvement in developing the nation's intercity passenger rail system through State Rail Plan requirements. PRIIA also required a single, nationwide standardized methodology for establishing and allocating the operating and capital costs of providing intercity rail passenger service. Appropriated PRIIA funds can be used to assist in financing the capital costs of facilities, infrastructure, and equipment necessary to provide or improve intercity passenger rail transportation. PRIIA describes project selection criteria and required grant conditions. PRIIA also authorized the appropriation of funds to establish and implement a high-speed rail corridor development program.

AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009 (ARRA)

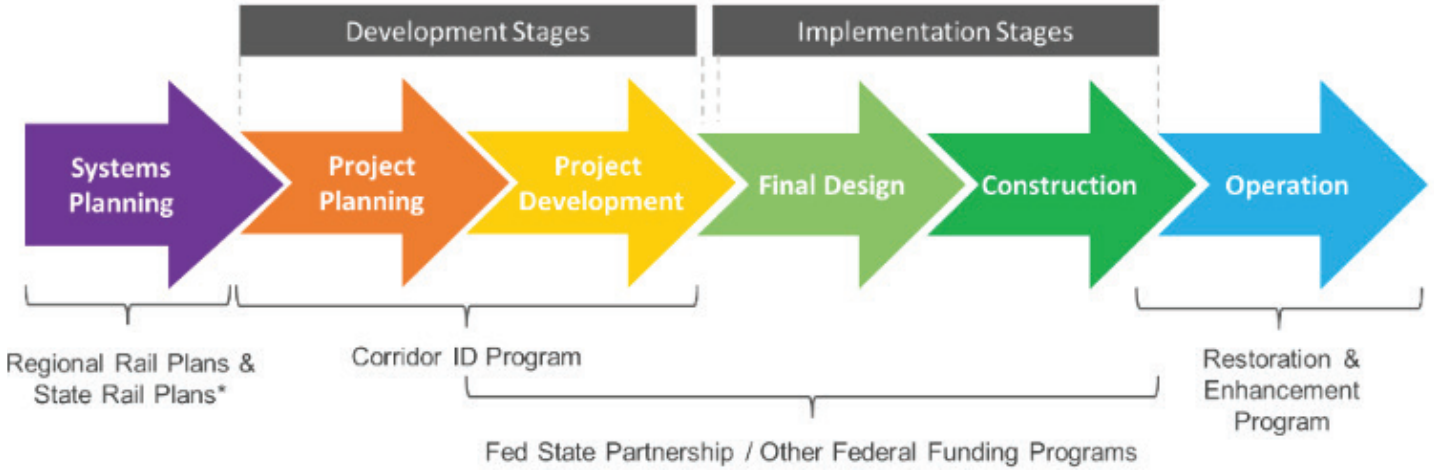
Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), which allocated $8 billion in grants to states for intercity rail projects marking a significant step towards creating a nationwide integrated public transportation system with high-speed and intercity passenger rail as the major arteries connecting cities. There were more than 60 ARRA grants funding projects across the country, including significant corridor investments in California, Illinois, Michigan, the Northeast Corridor, North Carolina, Washington, and Oregon. Florida, Ohio and Wisconsin refused the FRA grant awards, and funds were distributed to other projects. Some of the projects funded by ARRA include substantial renewal of railroad infrastructure that enhanced the capacity of the general railroad system, allowing passenger trains to operate faster, more frequently, and reliably. These investments in railroad infrastructure and capacity enhancements benefit the Class I freight railroads as well as passenger trains and are critically important to the national economy.

FIXING AMERICA'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2015 (FAST)

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015 (FAST) (Pub. L. No. 114-94) represented a historic milestone in surface transportation legislation. For the first time, intercity passenger rail had been included in a comprehensive, multi-modal surface transportation authorization bill. The FAST Act's rail title focuses on improving existing rail infrastructure, modernizing the railway system, and increasing funding for rail projects, including both intercity passenger and freight rail.

Adding more daytime departures from cities like Cleveland could draw more riders to this route.

Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited in Cleveland at 2:00 a.m. This train operating between Chicago and the East Coast carried 398,420 passengers in 2024. This route could potentially attract more riders if more services were added for daytime departures from cities like Cleveland.



The "Rail Title" authorized three new competitive rail development grant programs:

CONSOLIDATED RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS (CRISI)

As part of the "Rail Title", Congress authorized the CRISI program. The purpose of the CRISI grants is to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of passenger and freight rail systems. Eligible activities include a wide range of capital, regional and corridor planning, environmental analyses, research, workforce development, and training projects.

Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair: The purpose of this program is to reduce the state of good repair backlog on publicly owned or Amtrak-owned infrastructure, equipment, and facilities. Eligible activities include capital projects to (1) replace existing assets in-kind or with assets that increase capacity or service levels, (2) ensure that service can be maintained while existing assets are brought into a state of good repair, (3) bring existing assets into a state of good repair.

Restoration and Enhancement Grants: The purpose of this program is to provide operating assistance to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail transportation. Grants are limited to three years of operating assistance per route and may not be renewed.

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Amtrak will begin twice-daily service from Mobile to New Orleans, LA starting this summer, with four stops in coastal Mississippi. The "Mardi Gras Service" will offer convenient morning and evening departures from both cities.

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BEHIND THE SCENES: HOW AMTRAK IS PREPARING FOR WORLD CUP TRAVEL

Contributed by: Wendy Wenner

The number of passengers using intercity trains has completely returned to normal post pandemic levels and has actually reached a new record high. It is anticipated that long-distance and state-supported train ridership will follow, and fully bounce back by 2025.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup plans are underway, with Boston, New York/New Jersey, and Philadelphia working together to promote themselves as a travel destination for guests. A significant part of their strategy emphasizes the convenience of traveling via Amtrak along the Northeast Corridor. FIFA estimates around 6.5 million attendees will participate, with the tournament taking place in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. The Northeastern region will host 21 matches in three stadiums over five weeks, culminating in the championship match in New Jersey on July 19. The Travel Association predicts a rise in international tourists to the U. S. of 8.8% in 2025 and 8.9% in 2026.

Local organizers believe that Amtrak can manage the increase in visitors during the World Cup, enhancing fans' experiences. However, they also express concern over insufficient investment in the rail system, which has resulted in an outdated infrastructure that struggles to meet basic needs. Although the Biden Administration allocated $22 billion to Amtrak through the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, many projects will take years to finish, meaning improvements will likely be incomplete by the time of the World Cup. A major expansion in the Northeast Corridor is not expected to be complete until 2038.

Advocates say the issues facing rail transportation are due to long-standing budget shortages from Congress, not just recent administrations. Last year's ridership figures for Amtrak were unprecedented, and they are anticipated to grow again this year, indicating the system operates with very little capacity for error. There are worries regarding the Trump Administration's funding approach, which involved cuts to federal spending. Amtrak currently lacks a permanent CEO, adding to its challenges. Experts point out that despite a return to pre-pandemic ridership levels, Amtrak now frequently operates at full capacity.

To address the expected increase in passengers during the World Cup, authorities suggest that Amtrak should extend train services. The introduction of new high-speed Acela trains this month may help as they promise to increase seating capacity by

37% compared to older models. Amtrak is planning to service up to 28 Acela trains, an investment of $2 billion, and has allocated $5 billion to improve Northeast Corridor services.

Amtrak has not shared specific numbers regarding the Acela trains available for the World Cup, and ticket prices for these high-speed options are much higher than regular trains. John Robert Smith, a former Amtrak board chair, noted that the Corridor's infrastructure needs are clear and Congress must approach funding decisions seriously to ensure cities can draw more visitors. He acknowledged past difficulties with delays caused by catenary system issues during hot weather, which could present problems during the World Cup matches scheduled for June and July.

Amtrak intends to improve its performance this summer with more inspections and helicopter monitoring of the catenary systems. Organizers also face a complex task in planning for the upcoming FIFA draw on December 5, which will determine match placements for the eight teams. Different countries will attract varying tourist interests, influencing local travel plans, which may hinge on the official schedule. The host committee for New York/New Jersey is actively collaborating with Amtrak and transportation agencies to run simulations to prepare for potential service or security challenges during the tournament that encompasses many of the warmer days typically experienced in the Northeast. Amtrak has announced its plans to address the persistent challenges this summer through the introduction of more strategically timed inspections.

Amtrak also plans to incorporate helicopter surveillance to monitor the catenary systems and various electric signaling equipment. One of the major obstacles that organizers encounter is the intricate nature of planning in anticipation of December. On the 5th, FIFA is set to hold the draw that will determine the match placements for the eight teams involved in the tournament. Some countries hold more appeal for tourists than others, and even avid locals may delay their travel considerations until the official schedule is announced.

The host committee for the New York/New Jersey area is consistently participating in ongoing dialogues with Amtrak and several transportation agencies. Additionally, they intend to carry out simulations aimed at effectively predicting and tackling any possible service or security issues that could emerge during the Cup.

HIGH-SPEED AND INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL PROGRESS - 2025

Contributed by: Kenneth Sislak & David Wilcock

PASSENGER RAIL EXPANSION

Significant progress is currently being made in the development of high-speed and intercity passenger rail across the United States. This advancement reflects a growing commitment to improving transportation options and enhancing connectivity between cities, as well as addressing environmental concerns by promoting more sustainable travel alternatives. As projects are initiated and completed, the expectation is that these rail systems will not only provide faster and more efficient travel for passengers but also contribute positively to the overall economy and infrastructure of the regions served. Passenger volumes on both Amtrak and Brightline Florida are reaching unprecedented levels, setting new records in ridership. There is a growing interest in the expansion of passenger rail services throughout the country. As more people recognize the benefits of rail travel, discussions and initiatives surrounding the enhancement of these services are gaining momentum. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has allocated unprecedented levels of funding aimed at supporting both the development and expansion of passenger rail services throughout the nation. This article highlights the significant progress that has been made over the past 18 months in planning and developing new intercity passenger rail services across the country. Efforts to enhance connectivity and improve

transportation options have gained momentum, marking a positive shift in the landscape of intercity travel. The information presented here is up to date as of the end of May 2025.

CORRIDOR IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

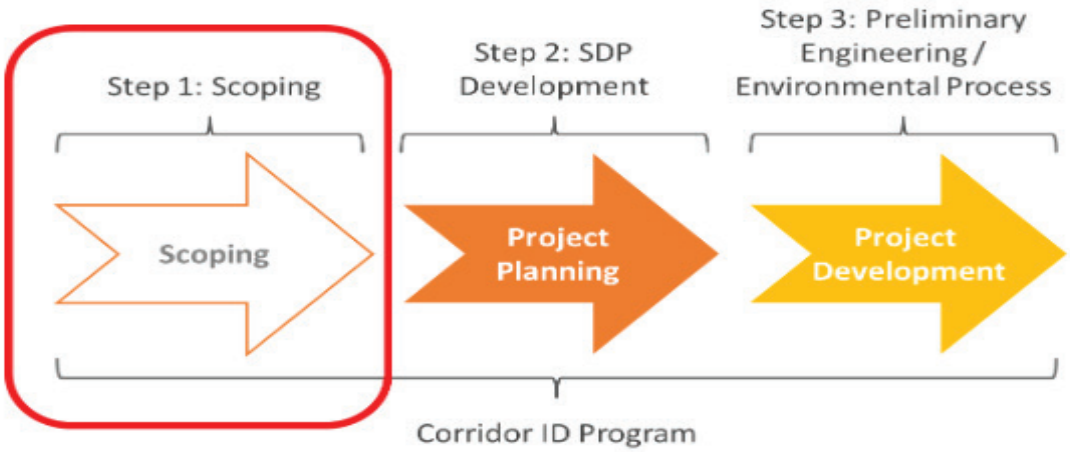
One of the programs established by Congress is the Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID or CID), which is administered by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The purpose of the program is to identify a "comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development program that will help guide intercity passenger rail development throughout the country and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation."

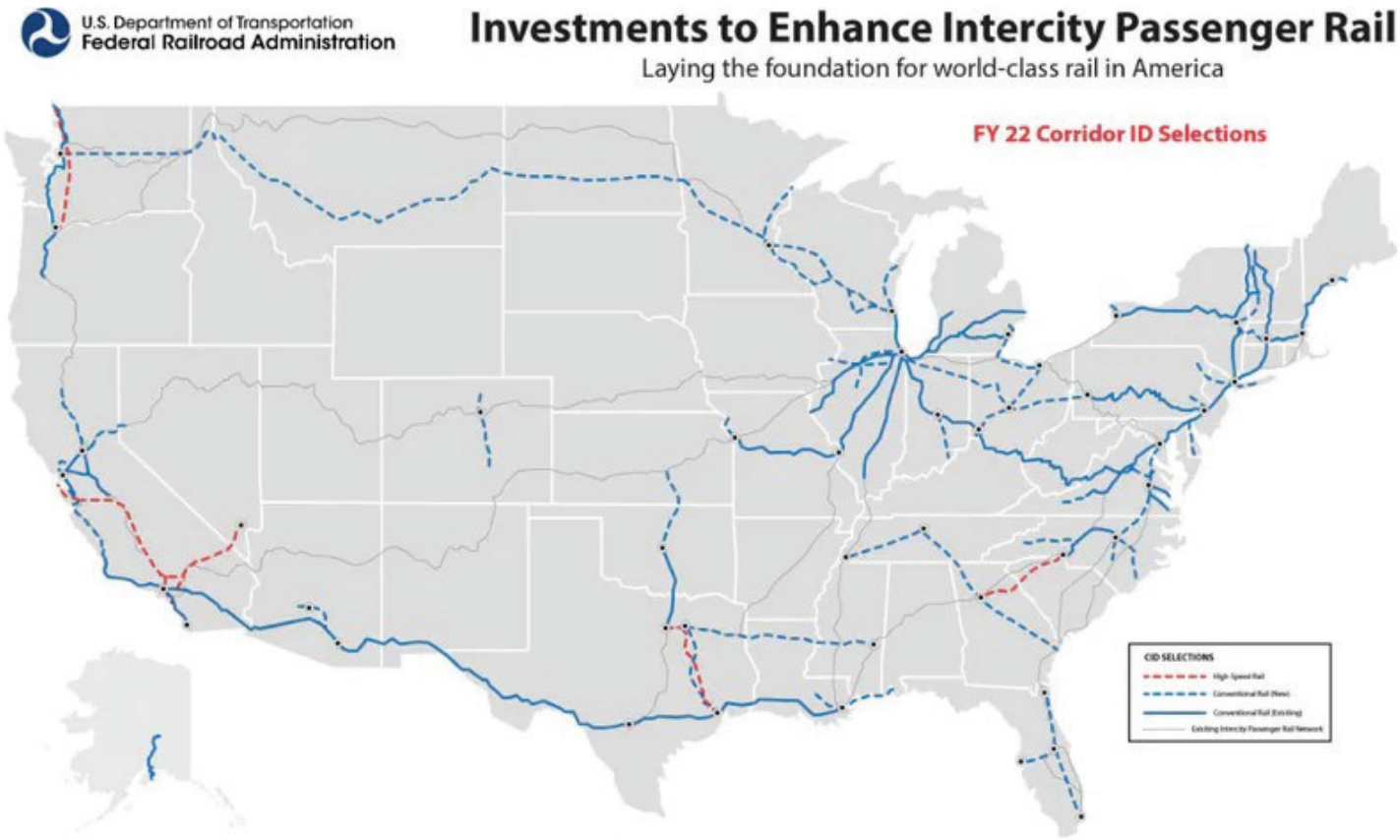
CID funding is organized into four categories of projects:

1. New High-Speed Rail: Services planned to operate at speeds of up to 186 mph or greater, primarily or solely on new, dedicated alignment.
2. New Conventional Rail: Services generally planned to operate at speeds of up to 79-125 mph, and primarily on existing rail alignments shared with other railroad operations (freight and/or commuter).
3. Existing Routes with Extensions: Existing intercity passenger rail services with planned extensions, operating at speeds of up to 79-125 mph and primarily on existing shared rail alignments.
4. Existing Routes: Existing intercity passenger rail services with planned improvements to frequencies, trip times, stations, or other characteristics.

The FRA established a three-step process for the program. The first step of the process is for the project sponsor to develop a scope of work, schedule and cost estimate for the preparation of a service development plan (SDP). The SDP is a long-standing FRA planning document that encompasses many different activities including Purpose & Need, Alternatives Analysis, project planning, implementation planning, environmental planning, coordination with host railroads and robust public engagement. The FRA awards up to $500,000 to each CID project to support the Step 1 scoping process. Step 2 of the CID process is the preparation of the SDP. Upon completion of the SDP, projects are eligible to move forward in Step 3 project development, which encompasses preliminary engineering and environmental clearance.

In December 2023, the FRA awarded grants to 69 CID program applicants across 44 states and the District of Columbia under the FY 2022 Notice of Solicitation of Corridor Proposals and Funding Opportunity for the Corridor Identification and Development Program (NOFO). There were over 100 grant applications received by FRA for the CID program. This is a testament to the popularity of passenger rail projects and the latent demand for passenger rail travel across a broad spectrum of states and communities in the United





States. Information on the corridors can be found at the following link: APTA Passenger Rail Pipeline Dashboard

The map above shows the breadth of projects in the CID pipeline. Each of the 69 corridors approved into the CID program are described in the following pages with a status of each project and grant award. Of the 69 projects in the Corridor ID pipeline; 61 are stuck in Step 1. Seven projects are in Step 2. The Amtrak Dallas - Houston HSR project made it to Step 3 until FRA rescinded the grant. In addition, some projects not in the CID program are described for reference.

AMTRAK (NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION)

Amtrak received grants for: daily Cardinal, daily Sunset Limited, and the Long Island Northeast Regional extension. Amtrak is also working with current and potential state partners to support other proposed corridors.

Amtrak's Long Island Extension, daily Cardinal, and daily Sunset Limited projects have all been obligated in Step 1, and Amtrak's Network Development team is working with the FRA to get those services obligated in Step 2 soon.

LONG ISLAND EXTENSION

The proposed Corridor would better connect Long Island, NY to the national intercity passenger train network by extending three existing daily Amtrak Northeast Regional roundtrips between Washington, DC and New York, NY east to Ronkonkoma, NY, with stops at Jamaica (Queens, NY) and Hicksville, NY. The proposed Corridor would entail track, station and infrastructure upgrades to accommodate these trains and better integrate Amtrak service with existing Long Island Railroad commuter service. Step 1 for the Corridor which included development of a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan is complete. Amtrak selected AECOM to provide technical support for completing the SDP in Step 2.

DAILY CARDINAL SERVICE

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Cardinal Service between New York City, NY and Chicago, IL via Philadelphia, PA, Baltimore, MD, Washington, DC, and the States of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (including Cincinnati, OH and Indianapolis, IN) by increasing service frequency from three days per week to daily. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in July 2024. Amtrak is seeking consultant assistance to complete Step 2 of the program to develop a service development plan. Amtrak is coordinating with Indiana DOT on the Chicago – Indianapolis corridor and Kentuckiana Regional Planning & Development Agency (KIPDA) on the Louisville – Indianapolis Corridor. The Step 2 SDP consulting assignment was awarded to AECOM.

DAILY SUNSET LIMITED SERVICE

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements

to the existing Amtrak long-distance Sunset Limited between Los Angeles, CA and New Orleans, LA by increasing service frequency from thrice weekly to daily. Intermediate cities served include Houston, San Antonio and El Paso, TX and Tucson, AZ. Funding was obligated for Step 1 in August 2024. Amtrak is seeking consultant support for completing the service development plan to restore daily service to the Sunset Limited. The Step 2 SDP consulting assignment was awarded to Gannett Fleming/Transystems (GFT).

ALASKA

Anchorage North and South Corridor

The proposed Corridor spans 470 miles between Fairbanks and Seward, AK, including Anchorage, Whittier, Wasilla, Talkeetna, Denali National Park, Nenana, and other intermediate points. The project would provide improvements to the existing intercity passenger rail services operated by Alaska Railroad Corporation by adding new frequencies, reducing travel times and improving reliability.

Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. The Alaska Railroad requested proposals in August 2024 from firms interested in providing planning and engineering services to prepare a comprehensive intercity passenger rail service development plan under the CID program.

ARIZONA

Phoenix - Tucson Corridor

The Arizona Department of Transportation proposed a Corridor that would connect Phoenix to Tucson, AZ with multiple daily frequencies. The proposed Corridor would reinstate service on an existing alignment over which Amtrak discontinued service in 1997, rerouting the long-distance Sunset Limited to a more southerly alignment through Maricopa, AZ (the corridor would use the same route as the existing Sunset Limited/ Texas Eagle between Picacho and Tucson). Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. The Arizona DOT contracted with a consultant team led by WSP and supported by AECOM to assist them in completing Step 1 of the CID program by preparing a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for its service development plan. Step 1 tasks have been completed and forwarded to FRA for approval to move into Step 2.

CALIFORNIA

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is the sponsor of five corridors. The California High-Speed Rail Authority and Antelope Valley Transit Authority sponsor two additional corridors in California. Caltrans has received feedback from FRA on their gap analyses for all corridors and are finalizing the statement of work, schedule, and budget with the respective lead project partners for each of the corridors. Caltrans anticipates beginning Step 2 for all five corridors by the end of summer 2025. Through the SDP process, a phased implementation plan will be developed with prioritized infrastructure investments for each corridor.

San Joaquin Valley Corridor

This proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing state-supported San Joaquin between Sacramento/Oakland and Merced, CA with an extension north from Sacramento to Chico and Redding, CA and would include added service frequencies. The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission is the Caltrans project partner. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in May 2024. Step 1 activities are complete and awaiting FRA approvals.

Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor

The Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency is a joint powers authority formed to manage the coastal rail line between San Diego, Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo and is staffed by the Orange County Transportation Authority. The Agency is the Caltrans partner working to deliver improvements to the LOSSAN corridor. The proposed project would enhance the existing Pacific Surfliner service between San Luis Obispo to San Diego,

CA with an extension south to San Ysidro, CA and would include additional service frequencies and infrastructure investments to improve reliability. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in May 2024. Step 1 activities are complete and awaiting FRA approvals.

Coachella Valley Rail Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide new service between Los Angeles and Coachella, CA using existing alignments currently served by Amtrak's long-distance Southwest Chief (Los Angeles to Colton via Fullerton) and Sunset Limited/Texas Eagle (Colton to Coachella), with intermediate stops including Fullerton, Riverside, Palm Springs and Indio, CA. The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is the project partner working with Caltrans to deliver this project. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in May 2024. Step 1 activities are complete and awaiting FRA approvals.

Central Coast Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide new frequencies over a route currently only served by Amtrak's long-distance Coast Starlight between San Jose and San Luis Obispo, CA The San Jose to Salinas and Santa Cruz to Watsonville segments would be assessed and phased as part of the larger corridor Caltrans and project partners plan to implement. The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) and Coast Rail Coordinating Council (CRCC) are project partners. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in May 2024. Step 1 activities are complete and awaiting FRA approvals.

Capitol Corridor

The proposed Corridor would enhance the existing state-supported Capitol Corridor between San Jose and Auburn, CA with an extension to San Francisco, Salinas, and Novato, CA and to Reno/Sparks, NV. The proposed Corridor would also include new frequencies. The Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) is the project partner working with Caltrans. Funds were obligated for Step 1 in May 2024. Step 1 activities are complete and awaiting FRA approvals.

High Desert Intercity High-Speed Rail Corridor

The High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency (HDC JPA) includes Los Angeles County, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (L.A. Metro), and the cities of Adelanto, Lancaster, Palmdale and Victorville. The HDC JPA is dedicated to securing critical funding for the continued planning, development, and construction of the Measure M High Desert Multipurpose Corridor Project linking the Antelope Valley in Los Angeles County with the Victor Valley in San Bernardino County. The first phase of the project will connect the areas through a new high-speed, intercity rail system—providing access to housing, jobs, entertainment, and cultural opportunities across Southern California while reducing freeway congestion. Eventually, the corridor will connect Southern California to Northern California, Las Vegas, and beyond. The proposed Corridor would provide new high speed rail service on a new alignment, serving to link together two other high speed rail lines under development: Brightline West (Las Vegas, NV to Rancho Cucamonga, CA) and California High Speed Rail Phase 1 (San Francisco to Los Angeles/Anaheim, CA). Funding for Step 1 was obligated in August 2024. On October 1, 2024, the FRA approved the High Desert Corridor Step 1 scope of work, schedule and budget paving the way for the HDC JPA and Los Angeles Metro to complete the HDC Service Development and Funding Plan in 2025. InfraStrategies has been supporting the HDC JPA with grant administration and financial planning support services. HDR was awarded a contract by HDC JPA for engineering services.

California High-Speed Rail Phase 1 Corridor

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) proposed high-speed rail line would connect San Francisco to Los Angeles/Anaheim, CA. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on a blend of new and existing alignments. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in March 2024. By adding the California high-speed rail's Phase 1 Corridor to the CID Program, the project was added to the federal list of projects in the program pipeline, which will be used by FRA for prioritizing future federal funding decisions over the long term. AECOM is the program delivery management consultant. Secretary of Transportation Sean P. Duffy directed the FRA to initiate a review of the CHSRA project. This review will help determine whether roughly $4 billion in federal funding should remain committed to the proposed project to build high-speed rail in the California Central Valley between Merced and Bakersfield.

COLORADO

Front Range Corridor

The Front Range Corridor would connect Fort Collins to Pueblo, CO, with intermediate stops at Boulder, Denver, Colorado Springs and other points. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. The FRA grant would allow the project to enter Step 2 of the CID program and continue development of its existing SDP that was funded through a prior FRA grant. That SDP is being prepared by HNTB, Steer and others and is administered by CDOT. The CDOT SDP grant award predates the CID program and formation of Front Range Passenger Rail District who is technically the CID program grantee. AECOM and HDR (separately) are also under a Project Development MSA with the Front Range Passenger Rail District.

Yellow indicates chokepoint relief projects. Blue indicates new segments. Green indicates new track.

CONNECTICUT

Hartford Line Corridor

The Connecticut Department of Transportation proposed Hartford Line Corridor to provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Northeast Regional, Springfield Shuttles, Valley Flyer and CTrail Hartford Line service as well as the Vermonter and future Inland Route Corridors between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA, inclusive of Hartford, CT. Restoring and constructing new rail infrastructure including track, stations, signal upgrades and safety enhancements, for the purpose of increasing regional intercity passenger rail service through additional frequencies and improved reliability. The Step 1 obligation from FRA was received by CTDOT on March 27, 2024. CTDOT is currently working internally to move forward with the Phase 1 SDP scoping, scheduling, and cost estimating process.

DELAWARE

Diamond State Line

The proposed Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) Diamond State Line would connect at a minimum of one point on the Northeast Corridor in northern Delaware (Newark or Wilmington) with a point in eastern Maryland (Salisbury or Berlin) via central Delaware, including the state capital of Dover. The Diamond State Line seeks to address the acute shortage of viable transportation options in a corridor that lacks both a direct interstate highway connection and the passenger rail option that other Northeast states and regions enjoy. It would restore passenger rail access to and from Delaware's largest cities and provide opportunities for multimodal connections to the communities that swell during the summer. This project supports DelDOT's goals of enhancing equity by serving historically underserved communities with better access to opportunities. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in March 2024. The DTC selected Rummel, Klepper & Kahl (RK&K) to assist with Step 1 of the CID program and develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

FLORIDA

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) applied for five corridors and received grants for two. The five corridors were:

1. Miami – Orlando
2. Miami – Jacksonville
3. Miami - Tampa
4. Orlando – Tampa
5. Orlando – Jacksonville

Several of these corridors were combined for the Corridor ID program into two: the Miami – Orlando – Tampa and Jacksonville – Orlando – Miami Corridors listed below.

Miami-Orlando-Tampa "Sunshine" Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Miami, Orlando and Tampa, FL. The proposed Corridor would provide new or enhanced service on one or more existing alignments, and potentially a new alignment between Orlando International Airport and Tampa. Funds were obligated for Step 1 in March 2024. FDOT is working with project partners in Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Brightline operates passenger rail service between Miami – Orlando. Brightline is planning to extend its service to Tampa. Brightline's parent company owns the right-of-way and tracks. Real estate development on land adjacent to stations drives the business model. Brightline carried over 3 million passengers in 2024.

Jacksonville-Orlando-Miami Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Jacksonville, Orlando and Miami, FL. The proposed Corridor would provide new or enhanced service on one or more existing alignments. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in September 2024. FDOT is working with project partners for Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Amtrak's Silver Meteor and Floridian (a temporary service modification to the Silver Star) trains operate over this route between Jacksonville and Miami via Orlando.

GEORGIA

Atlanta to Savannah Corridor

Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) proposed Atlanta – Savannah Corridor would connect Atlanta and Savannah, GA. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on existing or new alignment, with potential intermediate stops including Athens, Augusta and Macon, GA. The project entered Step of the CID program via a CRISI grant. GDOT contracted with WSP to prepare its service development plan (SDP) and the initiation of the environmental process. The SDP is funded with $8 million in Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) identified by Senator Jon Ossoff and $2 million in state matching funds from GDOT, for a total cost of $10 million. The SDP will identify the costs and potential funding sources for future activities beyond the study including environmental approval, design, construction, right-of-way acquisition, operation, and maintenance. A variety of federal, state, local, and private sources will be considered to develop a financial plan for the project. The SDP commenced in late 2023 and is expected to be completed by early 2028.

IDAHO

Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is working with the Utah Department of Transportation on initial system planning to prepare for future CID program grant applications for the Pioneer Corridor. The corridor would re-establish a route from Salt Lake City to Boise (previously the "Pioneer" train under Amtrak). Partners include UTA, UDOT, and City of Boise.

Credits: Savannah Morning News

Savannah Mayor Van Johnson spoke at the Amtrak Station in Savannah. GDOT is leading the Savannah to Atlanta Study under the FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program. The state agency has received $8 million in federal funding, along with a $2 million state match, to carry out the study.

ILLINOIS

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has a long history of operating state-supported passenger rail services. Illinois pays capital and operating subsidies to provide service for the Lincoln (Chicago – St. Louis), Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sandburg (Chicago – Quincy), and the Illini/Saluki (Chicago to Carbondale). In addition, Wisconsin and Illinois support the Hiawatha service (Chicago – Milwaukee).

Additionally, the City of Peoria and IDOT submitted a CID program grant application for new service. IDOT submitted CID program grant applications to FRA for development funding in four corridors in 2023. Three of the grant applications were awarded.

Chicago – St. Louis Corridor (Lincoln Service)

The estimated cost to build the Chicago-St. Louis high-speed rail project was around $1.9 billion. Three major ARRA grants totaling $1.34 billion were made for improvements on this 285-mile corridor since 2010. The purpose of the project is to reduce travel time by increasing maximum authorized speeds from 79-mph to 110-mph and improve service reliability and on-time performance. The project added a parallel track along the existing tracks in the corridor to improve reliability and safety and to increase the number of passenger trains and avert increased freight rail traffic in the corridor . Today, the Lincoln Service (Amtrak's Chicago-St. Louis route) operates at speeds up to 110-mph. The increased speed reduced travel time by approximately 30 minutes compared to the original 79 mph schedule.

IDOT proposed service improvements to the existing Lincoln Service between Chicago, IL and St. Louis, MO by improving travel times and reliability. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in June 2024. The Corridor sponsor contracted with WSP to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan for service improvements in this corridor. A program management team lead by WSP is supporting IDOT with all aspects of the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail project, including managing consultant teams for construction and planning projects within the program. WSP has been the Program Manager for Chicago – St. Louis Corridor improvement projects since 2009.

Chicago to Quad Cities Service Extension Program

The IDOT proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment connecting Chicago, IL to Moline, IL through Naperville, IL and Wyanet, IL. AECOM was IDOT's Program Management Consultant for the corridor from 2011 to 2015. The AECOM team prepared preliminary engineering, NEPA (Categorical Exclusion) for the improvements on BNSF between Chicago to Aurora and improvements at the BNSF Eola Yard. Work was underway on preliminary engineering and NEPA for the improvements on Iowa Interstate Railroad between Wyanet and Moline until the project was put on hold in 2015. Railroad agreements for final design, construction, and operations and maintenance with Iowa Interstate Railroad are still not fully negotiated. This continues to linger. Funds awarded for Step 1 have been obligated. IDOT has selected consulting teams for the various steps in the Corridor ID program. Quandel is the Program Management Consultant for Step 1 project planning and Step 2 service development planning. RINA, SpA (formerly Patrick Engineering) was selected as Program Management Consultant for Final Design & Permitting in Step 3. AECOM is on the RINA team for

Final Design and was selected as prime for Construction Management. The project is currently progressing – no longer on hold- with funding and political support secured and planning underway. Key hurdles remain, namely cooperation of Iowa Interstate Railroad and timely federal funding renewal.

Chicago to Carbondale Corridor

The IDOT proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Illini/Saluki service between Chicago, IL and Carbondale, IL by improving travel times and reliability. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in June 2024. Illinois DOT contracted with Quandel to assist them with Step 1 of the program

Rita Ali, currently in her second term as Mayor of Peoria, is a strong advocate for the introduction of passenger rail service to the city. During a press conference, the Amtrak route was unveiled, including stops in Joliet, Morris, Ottawa, Utica, and LaSalle-Peru.

to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Peoria to Chicago Passenger Rail Service

The City of Peoria proposed Peoria – Chicago Corridor service would connect Peoria, IL to Chicago, IL through Ottawa, IL. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in March 2024. The Corridor sponsor contracted with Chicago-based Patrick Engineering (now RINA, SpA) and Hanson Professional Services in Peoria to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

INDIANA

There are several corridors in Indiana that have received FRA grants to complete Step 1 of the CID program. Amtrak is studying the daily Cardinal that serves Indiana. The City of Fort Wayne along with its project partner the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) in Columbus, Ohio is studying a corridor that links Chicago – Fort Wayne – Columbus – Pittsburgh. The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) is studying the restoration of the Hoosier passenger train service between Chicago and Indianapolis. The Hoosier ran on the four days each week that the Cardinal did not run, giving daily rail service to the Chicago–Indianapolis corridor. The Hoosier ceased operating on June 30, 2019 when state funding for the train was not renewed in Indiana's 2019 state budget. The Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency (KIPDA) is studying the restoration of passenger rail service between Louisville – Indianapolis as an extension of the Chicago – Indianapolis service currently being studied by INDOT.

Chicago, Fort Wayne, Columbus, and Pittsburgh (Midwest Connect)

The City of Fort Wayne in partnership with MORPC in Ohio proposed the Midwest Connect Corridor that would connect Chicago, IL to Pittsburgh, PA through Fort Wayne, IN, and Columbus, OH. The proposed Corridor would reinstate service on an existing alignment. Funds were obligated for Step 1 in March 2024. The City of Fort Wayne and its project partner the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) contracted with HNTB to assist them in completing Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. HNTB has engaged local stakeholders and briefed them on the project.

Indianapolis - Chicago Corridor (Hoosier)

The proposed Indianapolis - Chicago Corridor by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) would restore and improve the existing Amtrak long-distance Cardinal service between Indianapolis, IN and Chicago, IL by adding new frequencies and improving travel times. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. INDOT has contracted with WSP to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. This effort is being undertaken in coordination with Amtrak's Corridor ID project to increase service frequency on the entirety of the New York-Chicago Cardinal route from thrice weekly to daily and with the KIPDA Louisville – Indianapolis project.

Louisville-Indianapolis Passenger Rail Corridor (Kentucky Cardinal)

The proposed Louisville-Indianapolis Corridor by KIPDA would restore the Kentucky Cardinal service and connect Indianapolis, IN to Louisville, KY. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment over which Amtrak discontinued service from the early 2000s. Funding was obligated in March 2024. KIPDA contracted with AECOM to assist them in completing Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. AECOM completed the assigned tasks in Step 1. KIPDA is awaiting FRA approval to enter Step 2 and is seeking budget approval from local agencies for funding commitments for the local share required to complete the service development plan. KIPDA has received support letters from Amtrak and the Louisville and Indiana Railroad.

KANSAS

Heartland Flyer Extension

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) proposed the Heartland Flyer Extension corridor, which would connect the existing Heartland Flyer intercity passenger rail service between Fort Worth, TX, and Oklahoma City, OK with an extension north to Wichita, KS and then Newton, KS. The proposed Corridor would include new station stops in Edmond, OK, Perry, OK, Ponca City, OK, Arkansas City, KS, Wichita, KS, and Newton, KS. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. KDOT contracted with DB-ECO to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

LOUISIANA

Baton Rouge - New Orleans Corridor

HNTB prepared a feasibility study in 2019 for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to identify infrastructure improvements necessary to re-introduce intercity passenger rail service from Baton Rouge to New Orleans on tracks owned by Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC). The proposed project would provide new intercity passenger rail service on an existing alignment that last hosted passenger trains in 1969. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in June 2024. The Louisiana DOT hired HNTB to assist them with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston and Albany Corridor

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) proposed a Corridor that would connect Boston, MA and Albany, NY via Springfield, MA. The proposed Corridor would provide up to eight daily round-trip passenger trains on an existing alignment that is currently being used by Amtrak's long-distance Lake Shore Limited. In December 2023, MassDOT was awarded a $500,000 grant to completed Step 1 of the program which included development of a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. In early July 2024, MassDOT solicited services to support Step 2 of the CID process. An award was made in early August to Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) to support the state with the preparation of the SDP pending approval by the FRA for MassDOT to enter Step 2 of the program. In early May 2025, a $3.6 million grant for Step 2 of the CID process was approved by USDOT. MassDOT is now able to move forward with service planning of the Boston to Albany route which serves as the east/west spine in the state's Compass Rail Program (see SPEEDLINES Issue 38). MassDOT officials note that it will likely take about two years to complete Step 2. CSX and MassDOT are discussing the infrastructure upgrades that will be required to relieve bottlenecks between Worcester and Springfield. It will likely be a minimum five to eight years before additional trips will be operating along the Boston to Springfield segment of the corridor.

MAINE

Downeaster Corridor Extension

The proposed Corridor would improve the existing Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) Amtrak Downeaster corridor, connecting Boston, MA to Brunswick, ME via Portland, ME, southwestern coastal Maine and southeastern New Hampshire, with an extension east to Rockland, ME. The proposed Corridor would also include added frequencies, reduced travel times, improved reliability, a new infill station at West Falmouth, ME, and technology improvements to ease connections between the Downeaster and other Amtrak services in Boston. The NNEPRA completed Step 1 of the program which included development of a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. NNEPRA advertised for Step 2 services in late July 2024. An award was made by NNEPRA in early October 2024 to DB Eco North America for support moving forward with Step 2 pending FRA approval.

MICHIGAN

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) sponsors three intercity passenger rail routes that serves 22 station communities. The services are operated by Amtrak. MDOT provides capital and operating assistance, technical support and safety oversight of Michigan's passenger rail system. In addition, MDOT owns a segment of the rail corridor that connects Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac. It funds all capital and maintenance work on the segment of the corridor between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. Currently, efforts are focused on increasing passenger speeds up to 110 mph in this area. Passenger trains have traveled up to 110 mph since 2012 on the Amtrak-owned portion of the rail corridor between Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Porter, Indiana.

Chicago to Detroit/Pontiac Corridor (Wolverine)

The 304-mile corridor between Detroit/Pontiac, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois is part of the "Chicago Hub" Passenger Rail Network and is a federally designated High-Speed Rail Corridor. This existing corridor is one of several major branches in the hub and spoke passenger rail system centered on Chicago, as identified in the Midwest Regional Rail Plan, published by FRA in 2021.

A total of 11 ARRA grants totaling $600 million funded improvements to this corridor. Passenger service is provided by Amtrak's Wolverine train. Major project elements included purchase of 135 miles of Norfolk Southern track and right-of-way; a flyover eliminating the level crossing of two busy freight rail lines reducing delays; and infrastructure improvements that increased track speeds to allow trains to reach speeds up to 110-

A great opportunity to build commuter rail linking Detroit, Dearborn and Ann Arbor.

mph. Travel time was reduced by 30-minutes making train travel competitive with driving.

MDOT proposes to extend the existing Wolverine service to Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The proposed Corridor would also include improvements to travel times and reliability. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in June 2024. MDOT contracted with HNTB to assist with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Chicago to Grand Rapids Corridor (Pere Marquette)

The 176-mile corridor between Grand Rapids, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois is part of the Chicago Hub Passenger Rail Network. This existing corridor is one of several branches in the hub and spoke passenger rail system centered on Chicago, as identified in the Midwest Regional Rail Plan, published by FRA in 2021. The proposed corridor improvements would provide added new frequencies and improving reliability to the existing Pere Marquette service between Grand Rapids, MI and Chicago, IL. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in June 2024. MDOT contracted with HNTB to assist with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plant.

Chicago to Port Huron Corridor (Blue Water)

The 319-mile corridor between Port Huron, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois is part of the Chicago Hub Passenger Rail Network. This existing corridor is also one of several branches in the hub and spoke passenger rail system centered on Chicago, as identified in the Midwest Regional Rail Plan, published by FRA in 2021. The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Blue Water service between Port Huron, MI and Chicago, IL by adding new frequencies and improving reliability. Funds for Step 1 were obligated in June 2024. MDOT contracted with HNTB in October 2024 to assist with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

MINNESOTA

Northern Lights Express

The Minnesota Department of Transportation proposed Northern Lights Express Corridor would connect Minneapolis, MN to Duluth, MN through Cambridge, MN and Hinckley, MN. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. Quandel Consultants is the consultant team providing project and program management oversight for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) project and is assisting MnDOT with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024.

MISSISSIPPI

I-20 Corridor Intercity Passenger Rail Service

The Southern Rail Commission has proposed the I-20 Corridor to connect Dallas, TX to Meridian, MS and plans to serve the following cities in Texas: Fort Worth, Mineola, Longview, and Marshall; the following cities in Louisiana: Shreveport, Ruston, and Monroe; and the following cities in Mississippi: Vicksburg and Jackson. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in August 2024. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on existing alignment. The Corridor sponsor would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Gulf Coast Passenger Rail Service

The Southern Rail Commission has proposed the Gulf Coast passenger rail project, which would restore intercity passenger rail service between New Orleans, LA and Mobile, AL, including station stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula, MS. This is a portion of the Sunset Limited route that Amtrak suspended indefinitely in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina. Grant funding for Step 1 has not been obligated. However, Amtrak continues to advance this project now and local communities have committed funding for station improvements. The project received a $178.4 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant to support infrastructure improvements in the corridor that were agreed to by

108th Mayor of Mobile, Sandy Stimpson, and other dignitaries attended a groundbreaking ceremony marking the construction of the Amtrak layover track and platform for the Gulf Coast Corridor Improvement Project.

Amtrak and the Class I railroads. Service on the Mardi Gras is scheduled to commence in 2025.

MISSOURI

Kansas City, MO to St Joseph, MO

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MODOT) proposed Kansas City – St. Joseph Corridor would connect St. Joseph, MO and Kansas City, MO, and will include connection with the existing state-supported Missouri River Runner route to St. Louis, MO. The activities undertaken as part of the development of the Corridor would result in a new proposed route Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. MODOT selected Crawford, Murphy & Tilly (CMT) and Quandel Consultants to assist with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Hannibal Extension of Existing Chicago-Quincy Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Hannibal, MO to Chicago, IL by extending an existing State-supported route, the Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sandburg between Chicago and Quincy, IL, . Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. MODOT selected Crawford, Murphy & Tilly (CMT) and Quandel Consultants to assist with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

MONTANA

Big Sky North Coast Corridor

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority proposed to restore service on an existing alignment that was discontinued by Amtrak in 1979. Grant funding for Step 1 of the CID program was obligated in March 2024. On July 30, 2024 the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority announced it had hired a consultant team led by David Evans and Associates, including Quandel Consultants, KLJ Engineering, and the Steer Group for work in developing the Service Development Plan for the Big Sky North Coast Corridor.

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has a long history of supporting the expansion and improvement of passenger rail in North Carolina to spur economic development and accommodate population growth. Mott MacDonald was hired by NCDOT to be the program manager for all Corridor ID projects. Step 1 is underway for each corridor. Statewide agreements are being reviewed with NS, CSX, North Carolina Railroad Company and RJ Corman. Step 1 for each corridor was assigned to a separate consulting team to complete the scope, schedule and budget for the corridor SDP.

Wilmington to Raleigh Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Raleigh, NC to Wilmington, NC and would provide new service on an existing alignment, part of which will need to be reconstructed and will include new stations. Funding for Step 1 was obligated on June 5th. NCDOT selected Stantec to prepare the Step 1 deliverables including a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a

service development plan.

Fayetteville to Raleigh Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide a new service connecting Fayetteville, NC with Raleigh, NC, with intermediate stops at Lillington, and Fuquay-Varina, NC, using an existing alignment. In June 2024, funding was obligated for Step 1 of the CID program. NCDOT selected Jacobs to prepare the Step 1 deliverables including a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan.

Charlotte to Kings Mountain Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Kings Mountain, NC to Charlotte, NC and would provide new service on existing alignment with capacity improvements west of the Charlotte Gateway Station and likely extending service to Kings Mountain, in addition to track, crossover, or signal improvements. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in April 2024. NCDOT selected Moffatt and Nichol to prepare the Step 1 deliverables including a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan.

Asheville to Salisbury Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Salisbury, NC to Asheville, NC and would provide new service on an existing alignment between Asheville and Salisbury, North Carolina following a line stopped hosting passenger trains in 1975. In June 2024, funding was obligated for Step 1 of the CID program. NCDOT selected Pinecone Transportation Professionals to prepare the Step 1 deliverables including a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan. Realization of this corridor would require repairing and rebuilding trackage that was heavily damaged by Hurricane Helene in September 2024.

Winston-Salem to Raleigh Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Winston-Salem, NC with Raleigh, NC, with intermediate stops at Greensboro, Burlington, Durham, and Cary, complementing the existing state-supported Piedmont and Carolinian services. This Corridor would also include new frequencies, improvements to reliability, and new stations. In June 2024, funding was obligated for Step 1 of the CID program. NCDOT selected AECOM to prepare the Step 1 deliverables including a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan.

Charlotte to Atlanta High-Speed Rail Corridor

The proposed new high speed rail alignment between Charlotte, NC and Atlanta, GA, with potential intermediate stops including Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport in South Carolina and Augusta and Athens, downtown Atlanta and terminating at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the world's busiest airport. NCDOT selected WSP to assist with the Step 1 task deliverables to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing a service development plan.

Charlotte to Washington, DC Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing state-supported Carolinian service between Charlotte, NC and Washington, DC (with existing service continuing north to New York, NY) by improving/adding services in Greensboro, Winston-Salem, High Point, Raleigh, Durham, Salisbury, and Burlington NC and Petersburg, Richmond, Fredericksburg and Alexandria, Virginia by addressing infrastructure capacity constraints. Improvements include constructing/rehabilitating a partially abandoned alignment between Raleigh, NC and Petersburg, VA creating a more direct route than the existing potentially saving more than an hour travel time. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. Mott MacDonald was contracted for this corridor.

NEVADA

Brightline West High-Speed Rail Corridor

The Nevada Department of Transportation is working in partnership with Brightline West on the proposed high-speed rail corridor that would connect Rancho Cucamonga, CA to Las Vegas, NV, providing new service on a new high speed rail alignment with intermediate stops at Hesperia and Victorville, CA. Funding for Step 1 has not been obligated. Brightline West officially broke ground on the nation's first true high-speed rail system in April 2024. Construction is estimated to take four years, and service is expected to be inaugurated in time for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic games.

NEW YORK

Empire Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Empire Service between New York, NY and Niagara Falls, NY via Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo by adding frequencies, reducing travel time, and improving reliability. HNTB has been engaged in working on the Empire Corrido for many years. HNTB prepared the Final EIS for the High-Speed Empire Corridor in January 2023. FRA issued a Record of Decision (ROD) of the proposed improvements to intercity passenger rail services along the 464-mile Empire Corridor, connecting Pennsylvania (Penn) Station in New York City with Niagara Falls International Railway Station and Transportation Center in Niagara

Falls, New York. The ROD was signed in April 2023. HNTB was selected by the NYSDOT to assist them with Step 1 of the CID program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024.

Adirondack Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Adirondack service between New York City, NY and Montreal, Quebec, Canada via Albany, NY, by completing a U.S. Customs Pre-Clearance Facility in Montreal, adding a second daily round-trip, and making track and infrastructure improvements to increase reliability, reduce trip times, increase safety, and achieve a state of good repair. NYSDOT selected HNTB to assist with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024.

OHIO

In the early 2000s, Gov. Taft commissioned a study of passenger rail services in several Ohio corridors. The Ohio Hub Study was completed in 2007 under Gov. Strickland. The Ohio Hub Study recommended the reintroduction of passenger rail service on the 260-mile corridor connecting Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati. The plan included station and infrastructure improvements, such as track speed improvements, grade crossing safety improvements, and new stations. The plan included speeds up to 110 mph. Gov. Strickland applied for $400 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for the 3C "Quick Start" project. The project was awarded ARRA funding in 2009. The project was not implemented. Gov. Kasich refused to accept the ARRA funding for passenger rail improvements. The Ohio funds were re-directed to Michigan and other states.

In 2022, Gov. DeWine instructed ORDC to submit grant applications for Step 1 on two corridors, the Cleveland – Columbus – Dayton Cincinnati Corridor and the Detroit – Toledo – Cleveland Corridor. The two applications submitted by ORDC were awarded grants. ORDC bundled the two corridors in one procurement for Step 1 of the CID program. It is expected that Step 2 will be separate procurements for the SDP in Step 2.

The Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), the MPO for Cleveland, submitted three CID program grant applications to FRA. The NOACA grant applications sought funding to study capacity enhancements permitting added daytime service frequencies on existing Amtrak routes serving Cleveland. NOACA did not receive any grants.

Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati Corridor (3C&D)

The proposed Corridor would connect Cleveland, OH, Columbus, OH, Dayton, OH, and Cincinnati, OH. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. ORDC hired HDR to assist them in completing Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit Corridor

The proposed Corridor would connect Cleveland, OH to Detroit, MI through Toledo, OH. This Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in April 2024. The ORDC hired HDR to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

PENNSYLVANIA

Keystone Corridor: Pittsburgh to Philadelphia

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Keystone and Pennsylvanian services between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA via Lancaster, Harrisburg, Altoona, Johnstown and other intermediate points by adding frequencies (including at least one additional daily round-trip between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh), reducing end-to-end travel time, and improving reliability. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. The Corridor sponsor would enter Step 1

Amtrak has consistently identified Ohio as a key area for expansion, emphasizing that the state ranks among the most underserved in the nation when it comes to passenger rail service.

of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Scranton to New York Penn Station Corridor

The PennDOT proposed Corridor would connect Scranton, PA and New York, NY, with intermediate stops at Stroudsburg and Mt. Pocono, PA; Blairstown, Dover, Montclair, Morristown and Newark, NJ. The proposed Corridor would provide new service (three daily roundtrips) on a mostly existing alignment, plus abandoned track to be rebuilt. The entirety of the alignment for this corridor is under public ownership. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. The Corridor sponsor would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. In October 2024, nearly $9 million in Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant funds was programmed to be used to upgrade railroad infrastructure along the Pennsylvania segment of the right-of-way, including bridge and track improvements. With this CRISI grant, federal and state funding toward restoring passenger rail in the corridor totals more than $20 million.

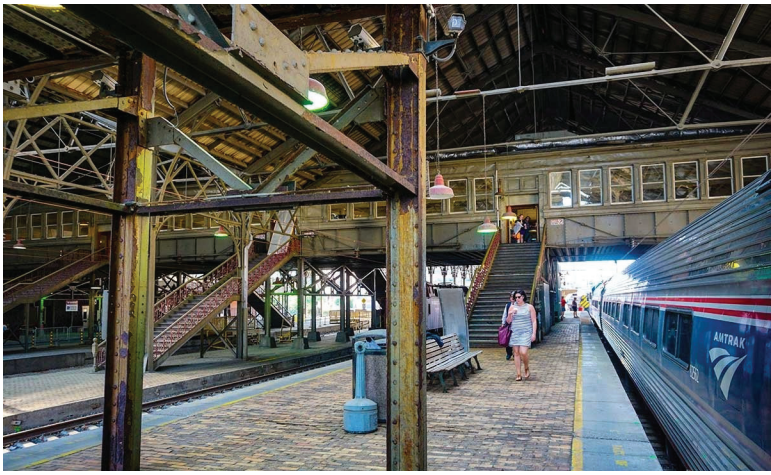
Reading - Philadelphia - New York Corridor

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA) has proposed a Corridor that would connect Reading, PA with Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY, with new intermediate stops at Pottstown, Phoenixville and Norristown, PA, connecting to the Northeast Corridor between Philadelphia and New York. The proposed Corridor would provide new service (four to eight daily roundtrips) on an existing alignment that last hosted passenger trains in 1983. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in March 2024. The SRPRA hired AECOM to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

TENNESSEE

Atlanta-Chattanooga-Nashville-Memphis Corridor

The City of Chattanooga has proposed a Corridor that would connect Atlanta, GA to Chattanooga, Nashville, and Memphis, TN. This Corridor would provide new service on existing alignments. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in May 2024. The City contracted with WSP to assist them with Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.



Harrisburg Transportation Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Keystone Corridor is a significant rail line that stretches across the state of Pennsylvania, connecting the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

TEXAS

Fort Worth-to-Houston High Speed Rail Corridor

North Central Texas Council of Governments proposed a corridor that would connect Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston, TX with a new high speed passenger rail service. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on a new alignment, with station stops in Fort Worth, Arlington, Dallas, Brazos Valley, and Houston. Funding for Step 1 of the CID program were obligated on May 16, 2024. The project sponsor selected HNTB to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan for the Fort Worth – Dallas segment of the Dallas - Houston HSR project. HNTB is conducting the EA for the Fort Worth – Dallas segment.

Texas Triangle: Dallas-Fort Worth – Houston Intercity Passenger Rail Corridor

Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) proposed a corridor that would connect Fort Worth, Dallas and Houston, Texas with a new conventional speed (79 mph) intercity passenger rail service over an existing alignment (between Dallas and Houston), which Amtrak discontinued service in 1995. The proposed Corridor would have additional station stops in Corsicana, Hearne, College Station, and Navasota, TX. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in July 2024. HDR was selected to help TxDOT complete Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Houston to San Antonio Corridor

TXDOT also proposed a corridor would connect Houston and San Antonio, TX with a new conventional intercity passenger rail service using the route of Amtrak's existing long-distance Sunset Limited service. The proposed Corridor would have additional station stops in Rosenberg, Flatonia, and Seguin, TX. HDR was selected to help TxDOT complete Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Dallas – Houston

The proposed Amtrak Texas High-Speed Rail Corridor would connect Dallas and Houston, TX with a new, dedicated and grade-separated high speed passenger rail service. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on a new alignment, with station stops in Dallas, Brazos Valley, and Houston. Amtrak has taken over the project from Texas Central Railway and completed Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. Upon completion of Step 1, Amtrak was permitted to enter Step 2 of the process and contracted with AECOM to prepare the SDP in compliance with current FRA guidance. This project is now in Step 3 project development with a funding obligation of $63.9 million as of September 2024.

UTAH

Salt Lake City - Las Vegas Corridor Desert Wind

Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) submitted a grant application for the Corridor ID program in March 2023. UDOT's application was for potential re-establishment of a route from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas (previously the Desert Wind route under Amtrak). The grant was not awarded. FRA told UDOT that a future application would benefit from additional quantitative data (e.g. projected ridership, estimated costs and benefits). UDOT recently selected AECOM to conduct a high-level statewide passenger rail feasibility study to gather more information on the potential for passenger rail in Utah and to prepare for future Corridor ID grant opportunities. The study will explore a variety of destination/route options, which could include new routes; evaluate both conventional (<80 mph, using shared freight track) and high-speed (>125 mph, using dedicated track) options; quantify the costs and benefits of potential passenger rail services and gather additional information needed to support a potential future Corridor ID application.

VIRGINIA

"Transforming Rail in Virginia" is a $3.7 billion program changing the future of rail transportation in Virginia by acquiring railroad right-of-way, increasing rail capacity, and reworking passenger and freight operations to improve reliability and increase rail service in Virginia. As part of the program, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) submitted two applications for the FRA CID program. One application was for the east-to-west Commonwealth Corridor between Hampton Roads and the New River Valley, and the second application was for the corridor between Washington, D.C., and Bristol, VA. DRPT will continue coordination with the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, North Carolina DOT and Tennessee DOT to explore opportunities for connections with adjoining passenger rail corridors under development.

Washington, DC to Bristol Corridor

The proposed Corridor would extend the existing state-supported Amtrak Northeast Regional service between Washington, DC and Roanoke, VA with an extension to Bristol, VA. This Corridor would also include new frequencies, improved travel times, improvements to reliability, and new stations, including a new infill station at Bedford, VA. Funding for Step 1 was obligated on May 14, 2024. The VADRPT contracted with AECOM to complete Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Hampton Roads – New River Valley Commonwealth Corridor

The proposed Commonwealth Corridor would connect Newport News with Richmond, Charlottesville and the New River Valley in Virginia. This Corridor would provide

new service on existing alignment, complementing existing state-supported Northeast Regional services connecting Washington, DC with Newport News and Roanoke, VA. Funding for Step 1 was obligated on May 12, 2024. The VADRPT contracted with AECOM to complete Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

VERMONT

Vermonter (added frequencies)

Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) proposed a corridor would that provide improvements to the existing Amtrak Vermonter service between Washington, DC and St. Albans, VT via Philadelphia, PA, New York, NY, Hartford, CT, Springfield, MA and other intermediate points by adding frequencies (starting with an additional daily round-trip between New York, NY and White River Junction, VT), reducing travel time (by 90 minutes between Springfield, MA and St. Albans, VT), improving reliability and extending service north to Montreal, Quebec, Canada (with the completion of a new U.S. Customs preclearance facility at Montreal's Central Station). Funding for Step 1 was obligated on May 8, 2024. In mid-August, VTrans solicited for the Step 1 services for this corridor jointly with the Green Mountain Corridor. The contract was awarded in late September to Cambridge Systematics (CS). They are currently moving forward with the development of the SDP scope, schedule, and cost estimate.

Green Mountain Corridor

VTrans also proposed a new corridor would connect New York, NY with Burlington, VT via Albany, NY and Rutland, VT, dovetailing with the existing Amtrak Ethan Allen Express by providing new service to communities in southwestern Vermont (including Bennington and Manchester) and east-central New York State (Mechanicville). Vermont previously completed a study of passenger rail service to the southwestern corner of the state in 2014. The intent of the current proposal is to inaugurate a new train that would start at New York Penn and travel up the Empire Corridor in New York as the Ethan Allen service currently does. It would diverge from the current route at Schenectady to serve Mechanicville (NY), North Bennington and Manchester on its way up the west side of Vermont to Rutland where it would rejoin the Ethan Allen corridor to Burlington. The Rutland to Burlington segment of the Ethan Allen service was introduced in July 2022 and has been highly successful. Should the proposed new service prove feasible, it would restore passenger rail service to Bennington County for the first time since the Rutland Railroad ended all passenger service in 1953. The Step 1 obligation from FRA was received by VTrans on May 8, 2024. In mid-August, VTrans solicited for the Step 1 services for this corridor jointly with the Vermonter Corridor. The contract was awarded in late September to Cambridge Systematics (CS). They are currently moving forward with the development of the SDP scope, schedule, and cost estimate.

WASHINGTON

Washington State has a long history of supporting passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest in partnership with the State of Oregon and the Province of British Columbia in Canada. The state-supported Amtrak Cascades is a multi-frequency intercity passenger train service linking Vancouver, BC with Eugene, Oregon via Seattle and Portland. The 467-mile route generally parallels Interstate 5, stopping at a total of 18 stations, 12 of which are in Washington. King Street Station in downtown Seattle and Portland's Union Station serve the largest number of passengers.

In 2017, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) led an investigation of the feasibility of developing an ultra-high-speed ground transportation system connecting Portland – Seattle – Vancouver, BC. The final report was issued in 2018, which suggested the project would have a meaningful and positive impact on the megaregion's economy and was worthy of further study. WSDOT and its partners continued the study of the high-speed rail option for the Cascadia region. HDR supports a full range of staff augmentation needs and oversees WSDOT's mega programs.

Cascadia High-Speed Rail Corridor

The Cascadia High-Speed Rail project would connect Seattle to Portland and Vancouver with trains traveling up to 250 mph. The proposed WSDOT high-speed rail corridor includes a potential future extension south to Eugene, OR. The proposed Corridor would provide new high speed rail service on a new alignment. WSDOT completed Step 1 of the CID. Funding in the amount of $49.7 million was obligated for Step 2 of the CID program in November 2024 for preparing a service development plan (SDP). The federal funding will be supported by $5.6 million from WSDOT. Consultant services will be advertised to assist WSDOT in completing the SDP.

Cascades Corridor

The Washington State Department of Transportation administered the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor Improvement Program (PNWRC Program), which received 11 ARRA grants totaling $809 million. The goal of the PNWRC Program was to improve the level of

service of the Amtrak Cascades route (a state-supported route) between Portland, OR, and Vancouver, British Columbia. The PWNRC program had approximately 17 component projects. These investments funded improvements to track, stations, embankment stabilization and the construction of the Point Defiance Bypass, which reduced travel times to 3.5 hours making the train competitive with driving and enabled the addition of two extra daily roundtrips in the Seattle-Portland Cascades corridor.

The proposed Corridor ID program would provide improvements to the existing state-supported Amtrak Cascades between Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and Eugene, OR, including Seattle, WA, Portland, OR and other intermediate points, by reducing travel times, improving reliability and adding new frequencies. Funding was obligated for Step 1 of the CID program in March 2024. A gap analysis is being conducted to determine the level of effort needed to complete the SDP. AECOM supported WSDOT in completing a Preliminary SDP, which was published in June 2024.

WISCONSIN

Wisconsin has a long history of supporting passenger rail service, especially in the Hiawatha Corridor connecting Chicago and Milwaukee. The successful introduction of the Amtrak Borealis train between Chicago – Milwaukee and Minneapolis/St. Paul suggests that passenger rail service expansion is necessary to support changing travel patterns and needs of a growing region. WisDOT and project partners applied for a total of five FRA Corridor Identification and Development (CID) grants.

Twin Cities – Milwaukee – Chicago (TCMC) Service Expansion via La Crosse

The proposed Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Corridor would initiate a new daily round-trip between Chicago, IL and St. Paul, MN to complement the existing Amtrak long-distance Empire Builder and the state-supported Borealis, with a potential extension to Minneapolis, MN. The proposed Corridor would also include a study of potential additional frequencies. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in June 2024. HDR was selected by WisDOT to assist in preparing the Step 1 work tasks to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Milwaukee to Green Bay (Hiawatha Service Extension)

The proposed Corridor would connect the existing Hiawatha service between Chicago, IL and Milwaukee, WI with an extension to Green Bay, WI. Funding for Step 1 was obligated on May 17, 2024. WisDOT contracted with AECOM to assist them in completing Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

Milwaukee to Chicago Hiawatha Service Expansion

The proposed Corridor would provide improvements to the existing Hiawatha service between Milwaukee, WI and Chicago, IL by adding new frequencies. Funding for Step 1 was obligated in April 2024. Quandel Consultants has been under contract to WisDOT to develop an Environmental Assessment (EA) and SDP for a proposed increase in passenger rail service on Amtrak's Hiawatha Service between Chicago and Milwaukee. The EA will analyze the environmental impacts that result from increasing the number of intercity daily round trips from 7 to 10 and from increasing speeds from a maximum of 79 MPH to a maximum of 90 MPH.

Milwaukee – Madison – Eau Claire – Twin Cities Passenger Rail Extension

The proposed Corridor would connect Milwaukee, WI to Minneapolis, MN through Madison, WI and Eau Claire, WI. The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. Funds for Step 1 were obligated on May 1, 2024. WisDOT selected HNTB to assist in preparing the Step 1 scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting a service development plan.

Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor

The proposed Corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment and proposes to use an innovative method of directly negotiating track access with the host railroad while competitively contracting out passenger train operations, maintenance and equipment provision. Funds for Step 1 were obligated on June 24, 2024. Eau Claire County selected a team led by HDR with HNTB to complete the SDP.

COMPETITION ON INTERCITY PASSENGER CORRIDORS

Contributed by: Ray B. Chambers, Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations (AIPRO)

There has been a lot of press recently devoted to privatizing or reorganizing Amtrak to improve performance, reduce costs, and spur innovation. Sometimes we tend to forget that in America passenger rail service was once provided by the privately-owned railroads as part of their common carrier obligation to transport goods and people.

Knowing our history may explain how we got here. Across the last century Europe and Asia have balanced aviation, highway, and passenger rail investment programs. America has favored only highway and aviation shortchanging intercity passenger rail. Passenger train ridership declined precipitously from 1955 through 1970 as travelers chose to drive or fly. During this period, the interstate highway system was funded to the tune of almost $1 trillion from the Highway Trust Fund. Airlines introduced new jet planes while the federal government subsidized the expansion of airport infrastructure.

The railroads were struggling with growing operating losses from passenger service. Amtrak was established by Congress in 1970 to transfer common carrier responsibility for passenger service from railroad companies to the federal government. Public transit authorities absorbed or funded commuter rail operations throughout the country. Amtrak began its service in May 1971. Amtrak has depended on annual appropriations from Congress ever since.

Amtrak meanwhile has enjoyed a near- monopoly on intercity passenger rail service. In contrast new rail authorities were established for commuter rail and the number of operators grew. Most of the modern authorities began selecting operators through open competition. The number of competing passenger rail operators grew. In 2024, Amtrak carried 32 million passengers. Brightline, a relatively new

* IN AUGUST 2024 WHILE CAMPAIGNING FOR PRESIDENT, DONALD TRUMP SPOKE ABOUT HIGH-SPEED TRAINS DURING A LIVE AUDIO CONVERSATION WITH ELON MUSK ON X (FORMERLY TWITTER). HE PRAISED JAPAN'S BULLET TRAINS SAYING, "THEY OPERATE AT ASTONISHING SPEEDS, ARE INCREDIBLY COMFORTABLE... YET, WE HAVE NOTHING LIKE THAT IN THIS NATION. NOT EVEN REMOTELY. IT'S ILLOGICAL THAT WE DON'T HAVE SUCH A SYSTEM!"

private intercity service, carried over three million passengers between Miami and Orlando. AIPRO member companies transported about 65.5 million passengers (Transdev 2.1 million; Herzog 17 million; Keolis 30 million; RATPDev 15.4 million). These AIPRO companies are anxious to enter the expanding intercity market to compete against each other and with Amtrak.

AIPRO proposes major reforms for the next Congressional Rail Title to develop an intercity rail passenger network through a public-private cooperative effort called the Direct Access Model. Competition is central to this program.

But will a healthy injection of competition truly revitalize our American network? Recent experience in the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom (UK) says it will. While the UK has experienced difficulties with privatization of infrastructure, there have been benefits from operations competition. The EU experience is a success.

UNITED KINGDOM

The radical privatization of British Rail infrastructure proved to be unsuccessful. However, American passenger rail infrastructure is basically owned by "host" freight railroads, so he UK infrastructure experience is not relevant. In contrast private competition for rail operations in Great Britain did result in improved efficiency. The punctuality and reliability of UK train operations increased notably, and significant numbers of modern trains and equipment were added to the fleet. Ridership also rose to levels not seen since World War II.

EUROPEAN UNION

In the 1990's the EU embarked on a "liberalization program" requiring national rail markets to provide competition against state-owned passenger railroads. AIPRO is examining the success of the EU mandate. A 2024, a European Commission study found that open access and competitive tenders have been successful. Across the board, they have led to lower ticket prices, better service quality, new trainsets, and increased demand for rail travel. State-owned railroads have adapted and are now competing effectively. Here are some examples:

AUSTRIA – Under the EU mandate, private Westbahn high-speed rail went into competition with the state-owned ÖBB. Ticket prices dropped about 50%. Ridership increased by about 60%. Customer surveys show 98% satisfaction.

CZECH REPUBLIC -Private RegioJet and Leo Express launched competition to state-owned CD. Ticket prices dropped about 50%. Additional trains were added, and ridership rose.

GERMANY – State owned Deutsche Bahn (DB) once had a monopoly, but today private operators hold about 37% of regional rail service under EU competition rules. FlixTrain and other regional operators have connected over two hundred additional cities under a single ticket. DB has modernized and remains a strong competitor and remains dominant in the intercity market.

ITALY – Turin-Salerno service is a major high-speed and intercity route connecting the northern city of Turin with Salerno in the south. It is served both by the government owned Trenitalia and the private company Italo. Thus, Italy now has head-to-head competition between two primary long-distance passenger rail operators. Both operators have experienced significant growth. Ticket prices dropped about 30%, new stock rolling was introduced and service improved. There was a noticeable modal shift from air service (Rome-Milan) to rail.

COMPETITIVE DIRECT ACCESS MODEL FOR THE UNITED STATES

A new competitive Direct Access Model has been developed by the Union Pacific Railroad and AIPRO in recent years. The Direct Access Model eliminates statutory operator preferences over track owners. Access, key performance indicators, and standards, including on-time performance, are negotiated legal contracts with disputes settled by arbitration. The Direct Access Model is designed to encourage competition for services and requires early expressions of interest from potential operators and service providers on any given project. The goal is a streamlined process. It can be a model that governs the expansion of the intercity passenger rail network replacing the existing Amtrak monopoly. Like DB in Germany or FS in Italy, Amtrak can continue to operate as a commercial entity and compete in this new marketplace.

CONCLUSION

Based on EU experience, encouraging full competition across intercity passenger rail corridors in America will produce similar excellent benefits. AIPRO proposes replacing the existing government-controlled intercity passenger rail model with a competitive public-private mechanism.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INNOVATIVE PASSENGER RAIL OPERATIONS (AIPRO) IS NOT A MEMBER ORGANIZATION OF APTA. HOWEVER, BOTH APTA AND AIPRO COLLABORATE ON INDUSTRY POLICY, WHICH INCLUDES FRA REGULATORY RULEMAKING AND ADVOCACY FOR INTERCITY PASSENGER AND COMMUTER RAIL. APTA SUPPORTS THE CONCEPT OF COMPETITION.

EUROPEAN NIGHT TRAINS

INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION DONE RIGHT!

Contributed by: Bernhard Rieder - ÖBB-Holding AG

Night trains had been the backbone of cross-border mobility in Europe during the first several decades of the 20th century. By the 1970s and 1980s Europe had a strong night train network – connecting countries from South to North and East to West. With the rise of budget airlines starting in the 1990's, Europe witnessed a dramatic decline of overnight train travel. From 2001 to 2019 approximately 65 percent of all European overnight train lines disappeared.

It was clear, either overnight trains would disappear completely from Europe, or something had to change. The Austrian railways (ÖBB) created a new service branded Nightjet in December 2016. The reason for this new service was to refocus on this segment of the travel market and to work closely with strategic partners. ÖBB also invested in new rolling stock to increase capacity and comfort for overnight train travelers.

The passenger count underlines the success of Nightjet service. In the first year, 2017, Nightjet carried around 650,000 passengers on its overnight trains. Nightjet now has around 1.5 million passengers per year on

overnight trains. Currently Nightjet offers 20 routes throughout Europe, with a focus on Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, but also connections to France and the Netherlands.

ÖBB believes in the future of overnight trains in Europe – which is shown with investments in new destinations and new rolling stock. ÖBB has a huge investment program ongoing, with a total of over €700 million being invested in 33 new night trains. In December 2023, ÖBB Nightjet launched their brand new "Nightjet of the new generation" service. ÖBB's new rolling stock for the Nightjet includes 231 new sleeping cars, couchettes, and standard coaches. With new rolling stock designed for overnight travel, ÖBB can offer the most modern overnight train service in the world to their customers with a new level of comfort and privacy.

ÖBB is currently upgrading many services with the new rolling stock. With a speed of up to 142 mph (230 km/h), the new trains will take you to many European cities overnight comfortably and in a climate-friendly way.

The seven-car Nightjet trains of the new generation each consist of two coach cars, three couchette cars and two sleeping cars. The maximum capacity per set is 254 seats. The design combines ultra-modern design with even more comfort and space. The most affordable way to travel is in a regular coach car with standard, reclining seats. Couchette car is a perfect option for families and groups of travelers, as well as for price-conscious single travelers. You can choose between three types of couchettes: 4-bed couchette, 6-bed couchette, and a private compartment (up to 3 adults). Preferred bed can be selected while booking. Sleeping cars are the most comfortable and sophisticated way to travel. Cozy beds and romantic atmosphere make it almost a traveling hotel. ÖBB Nightjet trains use two types of a sleeping car, Comfortline (most Nightjet trains) and Double-deck sleeping car (for Hamburg-Zurich, Zurich-Vienna, and Vienna-Zurich).

Photo courtesy of ÖBB

Photo: ÖBB / Harald Eisenberger

Traveling in the sleeping car or couchette is very comfortable as all compartments are fitted with their own toilet and shower facilities. A cozy seating area allows relaxed working, reading or eating during the journey. The sleeping cars have built-in beds in the sleeper compartments ensuring a relaxed arrival at the destination. The new Mini Cabins for solo travelers offer privacy in a compact space that has everything needed for an undisturbed night journey. The new multifunctional sleeping car offers bicycle parking for all cycling enthusiasts as well as more space for luggage and personal items such as skiing and snowboarding equipment.

For passengers with restricted mobility, a modern accessible couchette compartment as well as an accessible restroom are available in every new Nightjet, which can be reached comfortably via a low-floor entrance.

A modern passenger information system keeps you up to date with the latest travel information. Alongside conventional plug sockets, there are also USB charging options and an inductive charging station for a wide range of electronic devices. Free Wi-Fi enables travelers to stay connected to e-mail and the internet. New windowpanes enable better reception and improve network function. The windowpanes are coated with a special treatment that allow cellular signals to pass through, which results in a more stable connection for mobile phones.

Compartments also feature a control panel with various comfort features, such as light control and a call for service staff on board. The compartments are fitted with an electronic access system using NFC cards and all sleeping cars have video surveillance to further improve safety.

With a punctuality rate of nearly 94 percent, ÖBB ranked among the most reliable railway operators in Europe in 2024. And with the "Nightjet of the new generation" trainsets in service, ÖBB and its partners will continue to expand the overnight travel market.

OVERNIGHT TRAINS: A COMPLEMENTARY COMPONENT OF A TRULY NATIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM

Contributed by: Thomas Eastmond, Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Dreamstar Lines

Although high-speed rail has proven its value around the world, the concept has sometimes struggled for traction in the United States. Whole volumes could be written on the reasons why. In the long run, none of those obstacles ought to be insurmountable with intelligent policy reforms and careful project choice. Yet one obvious factor remains: North America is really, really big.

For the shortest trips (under about 100 miles), it can be hard to beat the convenience of personal automobile travel. Experience abroad (and to a limited extent on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor) demonstrates that in the next distance segment up, passenger rail – and particularly high-speed trains – can capture a healthy market share. That's readily understandable: Short-haul air travel is inherently inefficient, both as to energy and as to passenger time.

Experience abroad (and to a limited extent in Amtrak's Northeast Corridor) has shown that for trips between roughly 100 to 500 miles, passenger rail, and particularly high-speed rail, can capture a healthy market share from air transport. Air travel is the least efficient, both in terms of time and energy, in that distance bracket. Below 100 miles, the convenience of private automobiles dominates; above 500 miles, the inherent speed advantage of medium- to long-haul air travel begins to reassert itself.

The weakness of short-haul air travel is simple: Planes fly fast, but on a short-haul flight, more time is spent on the ground – traveling to often remote airports, navigating through security and check-in, boarding, taxiing, waiting for takeoff clearance, deplaning, obtaining ground transportation, and traveling to the final destination – than flying. A nominally one-hour flight, therefore, can easily be expected to take five hours or more overall.

Geographers have identified numerous North American "megaregions" – large, interconnected urban areas defined by shared economic and environmental systems. These include the Northeast, the Great Lakes, Northern and Southern California, the Gulf Coast, Florida, and others. Within megaregions, because of the inherent advantages of high-speed rail over short-haul air travel, intelligently developed high-speed rail projects can likely succeed.

The high cost of building high-speed rail systems – especially longer systems through difficult terrain – can be daunting, though. Especially until the strengths of high-speed rail in its sweet-spot distance range is empirically proven by successful projects, the saying attributed to Gilded Age industrialist Andrew Carnegie – "Pioneering don't pay" – is a not entirely irrational deterrent to being the first to take nine- or ten-figure financial risks.

In the meantime, a new player is entering the scene with a vision rooted not in futuristic maglevs or billion-dollar tunnels, but in a proven and surprisingly underutilized concept: the overnight passenger train. Dreamstar Lines, Inc., a California-based company, is developing a premium overnight rail service that promises to transform long-distance travel—and ultimately complement and amplify the ultimate development and impact of high-speed rail.

REINVENTING A CLASSIC

Overnight trains may sound like a relic of the 20th century, but Dreamstar is betting big on its comeback. The company plans to launch deluxe overnight trains connecting city pairs separated by roughly 350 to 750 miles—distances where neither flying nor driving offers a truly seamless experience.

Overnight passenger rail offers an elegant solution to the "too far too drive, too short to fly, too expensive to build HSR" market gap. In the eight to twelve hours it takes a train – traveling at conventional speeds on an existing track – passengers spend most of their time asleep in comfortable private rooms. "If a short-haul trip takes five hours," observed Dreamstar's co-founder and CEO Joshua Dominic, "that means we have about five hours of waking time to play with to be competitive with a plane trip."

Dreamstar aims to combine the best aspects of classic Pullman cars with modern amenities—onboard Wi-Fi, high-end bedding, tech-driven concierge-quality amenities, upscale food and beverage service, and hotel-quality passenger care. The idea is simple: fall asleep in one city, wake up refreshed in another.

STRATEGIC SWEET SPOT: CONNECTING ADJACENT MEGAREGIONS

This vision is not merely romantic—it's smart economics. High-speed rail, though expensive, enjoys considerable advantages over air travel between the connected cities within a single North American megaregion. Those advantages, however, begin to taper off when it comes to travel between megaregions – where air passengers spend relatively more time speeding along at 500 miles per hour than running around on the ground. Overnight trains can effectively extend the distance where rail retains its overall "net" time advantage – by taking advantage of the eight "free" hours human beings typically spend asleep anyway.

Unlike high-speed rail, which requires extensive new infrastructure and long timelines, overnight trains like those planned by Dreamstar can operate on existing freight rail lines with relatively minor upgrades. This infrastructure-light approach sidesteps some of the most significant obstacles facing projects like California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR), which has faced delays, cost overruns, and political headwinds in building a new right-of-way through the Central Valley.

We don't need to build entirely new corridors from scratch. We're working with what already exists—upgrading, modernizing, and elevating it to offer

something uniquely competitive in today's travel market.

Joshua Dominic and I began developing the project as independent ventures before joining forces in 2022. The idea for the company germinated from "one miserable trip too many," between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area when I was a young lawyer. The alternatives were getting up at oh-dark-thirty to fly out of LAX and barely make a 10:00 a.m. deposition and start feeling like I'd already put in a full day's work – or go up the night before and get a hotel. Neither, I felt, was satisfactory. Learning that there was no overnight train service – and after taking a deep dive, guided by contacts among his public transportation agency legal clients, into the reason why no additional Amtrak service was likely, I eventually concluded that there was no compelling reason why a well-organized private operator of overnight trains, in their ideal niche, should not succeed.

My co-founder and CEO of Dreamstar Lines, Joshua Dominic, independently had begun developing a business plan for the project after extensive experience with overnight trains in Europe and Asia. Joshua said, "Basically, we figured if we wanted to ride this thing, we'd have to build it ourselves. We spent a long time trying to 'kill' the idea – to figure out what we were missing that meant this couldn't work. And we were unsuccessful in that endeavor."

PROMISING CORRIDORS AND REGIONAL SYNERGIES

Several potential routes fall squarely into Dreamstar's sweet spot. For its first route, Dreamstar has chosen the busy and lucrative Los Angeles - San Francisco Bay Area market. It's one of the busiest in the country and the ideal distance Joshua observed.

The route retraces the historic Lark service once operated by Southern Pacific. The Lark was a high-end overnight service valued by businesspeople travelling between the two West Coast cities. Passengers could enjoy deluxe Pullman sleeping car accommodation and a sophisticated dining car experience where breakfast and dinner were served. The Lark was scheduled to depart terminals at 9:00 p.m. and arrive at destinations by 8:30 a.m. the following morning, which was perfect for anyone on a business trip that had to be at either city early in the morning.

Dreamstar's vision aims to renew and redefine the Lark service by prioritizing comfort, convenience, and sustainability. Under Dreamstar's current proposal, two trains, one headed north, and one headed south, would run every night departing from each terminus at about 10:00 p.m. and arriving at their destination the next day at 8:30 a.m. The trains would have a limited number of intermediate station stops, potentially including Palo Alto, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and one or more stops in Southern California's San Fernando Valley. Dreamstar signed an MOU with Union Pacific in 2024 towards securing track access between the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

Dreamstar's trainsets are currently planned to consist of upgraded and reconfigured existing bi-level cars with two different configurations: a standard class car with a mix of single roomettes (Dreamstar calls "Standard"), bedrooms (sleeping 2), and family suites, and a first-class configuration with deluxe suites and (as Dominic phrased it) "a totally ridiculous presidential suite." Renderings by BMW'S DesignWorks, Dreamstar's design contractor, depict spacious private cabins, convertible sleeping arrangements, private bathroom and shower facilities, and lounge areas. A more detailed examination of the interior design philosophy and renderings can be found at Dreamstar Interior Design . A tentative part of Dreamstar's ultimate plan would also allow passengers to transport their automobiles on the train like Amtrak's Auto Train on the East Coast.

One great thing about the Dreamstar overnight model is the potential for synergy with future high-speed rail. If you connect two megaregions by overnight train, then the overnight terminals can be hubs for future high-speed lines that don't have to be that long. For example, if you connect LA to the Bay, then with a high-speed connection on to Sacramento or San Diego, you're still under the waking time with a short-haul flight. Same thing with LA to Phoenix on to Tucson, or Atlanta to Orlando on to South Florida via Brightline. There's all kinds of potential like that.

LOOKING AHEAD

Dreamstar's objective is to be operational before the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. Its business model is gaining attention from both transportation planners and private investors. If successful, the company could prove that the future of American rail isn't just high speed alone – it's high comfort, high efficiency, and high value.

Dreamstar's premium overnight trains won't replace air travel or HSR, but they don't need to. Instead, they offer a new layer of connectivity that plays to rail's enduring strengths: comfort, sustainability, and the ability to transform travel time into restful downtime. As the United States. continues to search for scalable, cost-effective ways to improve intercity mobility and reduce its transportation emissions, Dreamstar Lines might just offer a first-class ticket into the future—one sleeper car at a time.

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