



WESTERN
High Speed Rail Alliance



BACKGROUND

Never before have so many variables converged to foster the development of a national high-speed rail (HSR) network that could catapult the United States back into the forefront of the transportation industry. President Obama announced soon after he was sworn in that his administration would be placing a significant emphasis on building a national high-speed rail system. This effort was part of his economic stimulus package but more importantly a national vision for investing in and building additional infrastructure as well as going more green. These investments would result in job creation and resolve the pressing need to relieve overburdened highway and air congestion. All of these factors combine to make this the ideal time to implement a coast-to-coast high-speed rail system. The vision is there. Now we, as an alliance, must lead the charge for access in the Western states.

THIS IS THE IDEAL TIME TO IMPLEMENT
A COAST-TO-COAST HIGH-SPEED
RAIL NETWORK.





Current transportation statistics are in our favor. Transit and intercity passenger rail (ICPR) ridership is at an all-time high. The Northeast corridor has seen significant ridership increases in the past year due to increased fuel prices, airport security-line hassles, highway congestion and on-time performance issues of alternative modes.

As the nation continues to deal with congested highways, increased costs to complete highway projects, high fuel prices and poor air quality, transit rail and ICPR provide an ideal solution that benefits all Americans.

For nearly a half century, the primary focus for passenger rail has targeted the development and funding of Amtrak's Eastern corridor, while

routes and service between the major population centers in the rest of the country have been in steady decline. HSR in the western U.S. is limited to Amtrak's Cascade line, but does not connect the region's micropolitan areas to metropolitan areas like Phoenix, Denver, Reno, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The Obama administration, working with congressional supporters of rail including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), has started to develop plans for the future of transportation in the United States, relying heavily upon HSR between all major metropolitan centers. Ultimately, this will connect the nation, much like Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System vision of the 1950s.



HSR is the preferred transportation mode in the Far East, Near East, Europe and now in the Middle East. Qatar and Kuwait are spending \$10 billion each (\$20 billion total) and the United Arab Emirates is spending twice that on bullet trains, monorails, HSR and major transit facilities throughout Dubai – the first of which will open in September 2009.

China is spending \$180 billion over the next two years designing and constructing a system to connect their nation with high-speed rail. There are plans to connect that system with the Near East and Far East and ultimately with the Middle East. Further, China believes that an eventual connection to Europe is fundamental to establishing their future economic viability and sustainability. Should this vision become reality, Europe connecting to the Far East will give both regions a competitive economic advantage over the United States. Why should the U.S. be following Europe, China and the Middle East? The U.S. should be in the lead.



We strongly believe that funding of future corridor studies is essential to the development of the robust HSR network that President Obama envisions. Future corridors must be studied now in order to lay the groundwork for additional development. After initial feasibility studies are completed, Congress can proceed with the additional authorization and appropriation for the project.



AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HSR

As highway capacity between major metropolitan centers becomes increasingly overburdened, the corresponding options for expansion are also increasingly limited. Environmental challenges, right-of-way constraints, escalating costs and the limits of highway technology all contribute to the demise of unlimited highway expansion. Connecting the western U.S. would be the first

step toward reducing air traffic and highway congestion, while in turn increasing interstate highway capacity for trucking and improving air quality by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Connecting Western states via high-speed rail is the future of our nation.

High-speed rail will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce congestion and put the U.S. even with, if not ahead of, the rest of the world in connectivity and global economic sustainability.

Developing a connection between the cities of Denver, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Los Angeles, as well as a connection between Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno and San Francisco, which ultimately connects to Portland and Seattle, will create a Western network of high-speed rail that's unparalleled in the nation and the world.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission (NSTPRC), created by Congress in 2005 within SAFETEA-LU, recommended that the entire country should be connected by high-speed rail by 2050. And further, that the high-speed rail should connect population centers within 500 miles of each other. In November 2006, the federal General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that: "The

existing intercity passenger rail system is in poor financial condition and the current structure does not effectively target federal funds to where they provide the greatest public benefits, such as transportation congestion relief. Routes of 750 miles or more, while providing service for some rural areas and connections between regions, show limited public benefits for dollars expended. These routes account for 15 percent of riders but 80 percent of financial losses. "Corridor" routes (generally less than 500 miles in length) have higher ridership, perform better financially, and appear to offer greater potential for public benefits."

We are not proposing to continue the current failed system of passenger rail in the West, but rather, as the NSTPRC and GAO have suggested, an entirely new approach focused on service between population centers within 500 miles of one another.

The cost of this connectivity must be measured by efficiency on many levels: not only on-time performance, but also the reduction of highway congestion that thereby reduces the need for additional highway capital projects, and lower greenhouse gas emissions that improve air quality regionally.





HIGH-SPEED RAIL: THE WESTERN CONNECTION

The Western High Speed Rail Alliance envisions a Denver-to-Los Angeles corridor via high-speed rail network, with regional hubs in Las Vegas, Salt Lake, Denver and Phoenix. The unique position of Las Vegas makes it an ideal hub, connecting Phoenix to Denver, Phoenix to Seattle, Reno to San Francisco, Salt Lake City to Reno to San Francisco, Denver to Los Angeles and Salt Lake City to Los Angeles.

The funds made available under the High-Speed Rail portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is just the beginning of the initial investment of a high-speed rail network in our nation. While the WHSRA was not formed at the time, we plan to participate in the new transportation authorization legislation as well as work with the administration to be designated part of the high-speed rail network. The initial steps the alliance will have to take include conducting

several studies that will provide the framework for regional high-speed rail that crosses multiple states and multiple jurisdictions. Much like the Interstate Highway System of the 1950s, this new HSR network will be borderless. The financing to conduct a multistate plan to include preliminary ridership studies, rights-of-way alignments, preliminary engineering studies, preliminary eco-system impacts, corridor connectivity and the needs of each community in order to prepare for high-speed rail, is estimated to be \$30 million to \$50 million over a three-year period. This is not just an authorization item, but should be part of a national vision for an HSR network.

MOVING FORWARD

As the Congress and administration move forward with the implementation of a national high-speed rail network, it's essential that provisions be made for future corridors like the Western High Speed Rail Alliance Corridor.





MEMBERS OF THE WESTERN HIGH-SPEED RAIL ALLIANCE:

Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)
Denver, Colorado

Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG)
Phoenix, Arizona

Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC)
Las Vegas, Nevada

Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County (RTC)
Reno, Nevada

Utah Transit Authority (UTA)
Salt Lake City, Utah

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