



Petra Todorovich
Director

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The Honorable Corrine Brown
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines,
and Hazardous Materials
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Brown:

Thank you for your further questions for the record of the hearing, “High-Speed Rail in the United States: Opportunities and Challenges.” I have reproduced your questions and provided my responses below.

- Q: You mention the need to use electric-powered rail to draw from renewable energy sources. How can passenger/high-speed rail play a role in the climate change debate?
 - A: In addition to the ability of electrified passenger rail to draw its electricity from renewable sources, thus avoiding the use of imported motor fuel; high-speed rail can reinforce sustainable land development patterns by supporting more compact, walkable communities. By connecting passengers from center city to center city, passenger rail reinforces the primacy of center cities as the most efficient place to concentrate jobs, housing, and commercial activities. Concentrating activities in central places reduces the need for auto trips, again reducing our depending on foreign oil and curbing greenhouse gas emissions. High-speed rail can also serve the greatest number of intercity passengers on the smallest land area footprint – (think of the amount of space required by an airport to serve a similar number of passengers as high-speed rail or the number of parking spaces needed to accommodate the 206,000 regional and intercity rail passengers who arrive in Manhattan via Penn Station every day). And high-speed rail will work best when it connects to local and regional public transportation networks, reinforcing sustainable land patterns and transit-oriented development in the regions it serves. Finally, passenger trains are generally more energy efficient on a per-passenger basis than autos or airplanes for intercity trips. Though, the energy efficiency on a per passenger basis is dependent on the degree to which the trains are filled with passengers—one reason why we must

invest strategically in places that are likely to have the strongest ridership demand.

- Q: You state in your written testimony that the Federal government should proceed strategically and invest the \$8 billion provided in the Recovery Act first in high-speed rail corridors that show the greatest promise for generating ridership that will offset long-term operating costs. You recommend that FRA should develop a mechanism for judging which corridors have the greatest potential ridership demand for high-speed rail. What mechanism should they use?
 - A: Our study, “Where High-Speed Rail Works Best,” provides one mechanism for evaluating potential ridership. We hope the FRA will review the results of this study as they develop their own model of estimating ridership demand for passenger services nationwide. We are also updating our study to consider additional criteria that we believe will contribute to ridership demand and recommend that the FRA consider these criteria in its analysis. They include:
 - City and metropolitan area population.
 - Population and employment density around proposed station areas.
 - Distance of the corridor, favoring corridors of 90 - 600 miles in length. (Longer distances are more efficiently served by air travel and shorter distances are better served by local and regional transit or auto trips.)
 - Existence and extent of local and regional public transit systems connecting to proposed high-speed rail stations. Public transit ridership in regions with proposed HSR stations.
 - Per capita metropolitan GDP of regions connected by proposed HSR networks.
 - Existing intercity travel markets between cities in the proposed corridor, as measured by air and auto trips
 - Projected population growth in cities and regions of proposed services.
 - Estimated numbers of tourists and visitors that may use high-speed rail.
- Q: You discuss defining high-speed rail corridors. Historically, high-speed rail corridors have been designated by the Secretary. The creation of the eleven corridors stems back to the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 when a program was created to eliminate grade crossings on high-speed rail routes. Do you believe that the way in which a high-speed rail corridor is defined and designated is outdated, and if so how would you recommend defining corridors? Do you think this should be done in our high-speed rail corridor development program which is part of the Surface Transportation Authorization Act?
 - A: Much has changed in this country since 1991 when the federal high-speed rail corridors were first developed. It is time to update this map to reflect the federal goals for a national high-speed rail program and show corridors on the map that have the potential to meet these goals. The FRA took a step in this direction with the Preliminary National Rail Plan released in October 2009. Moving forward, the FRA should develop a set of clearly defined, broadly supported, goals for the federal high-speed rail program and criteria that measure each potential corridor’s ability to meet those goals. For example, if the goal of the program is

to offset short-haul air flights at the nation's busiest airports, the map could reflect high-speed rail corridors that have the greatest potential to achieve this goal. However, we assume that the federal program will aim to meet multiple goals, thus suggesting an approach in which the FRA considers and weighs multiple criteria with expressed interest by states and regions to pursue and develop corridors.

- The FRA should also continuously update and keep current the map it includes in its 2009 Preliminary National Rail Plan on p 11 (Figure 4), which reflects high-speed/passenger rail planning efforts nationwide. Future versions of this map should reflect the FRA's three separate categories of high-speed rail: HSR Express; HSR Regional, and Emerging HSR. After the FRA finishes reviewing the first round of applications for the ARRA high-speed rail funding, they will be in a better position to update this map with the most recent information on planning efforts across the country.
- The high-speed rail corridor development program in the Surface Transportation Authorization Act is consistent with the approach recommended above, though it could go into greater detail calling on the Secretary to evaluate proposed corridors against stated goals for the national high-speed rail program.
- One additional suggestion for this Committee is to make every effort to appropriate adequate funding to the FRA to build staff capacity as it makes the transition from responsibilities that focused primarily on railroad safety to significant new planning and policy responsibilities.

Sincerely,



Petra Todorovich