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National coalition urges Congress to raise high speed rail allocation to \$4 billion

Also call on Congress to fully fund Amtrak at \$2.6 billion

WASHINGTON, DC – With the call “Keep High-Speed Rail Moving,” a national coalition of rail, transportation and consumer advocacy organizations called on Congress today to increase the high speed rail FY2011 appropriation to \$4 billion to modernize U.S. transportation, stimulate economic and job growth and advance energy policy. The coalition also seeks full funding of Amtrak at \$2.6 billion.

“High speed rail is a long-term investment in our nation’s economic prosperity and competitiveness,” said Petra Todorovich, director of **America 2050**. “By serving dense job centers and connecting to regional and local transit, high-speed rail can act as the framework for sustainable, transit-oriented growth in the 21st century.”

In addition to the increased mobility and improved national transportation network brought about by high speed rail, studies and estimates from around the country compiled by the coalition show investing in the technology could generate more than 2 million U.S. jobs, avoid 11 million tons of emissions annually and cut the nation’s oil dependence by nearly 600 million gallons each year.

“The benefits that will flow to our society far outweigh the proposed investment,” said Eric Peterson, President of the **American High Speed Rail Alliance**. “An aggressive investment in high speed rail will create tens of thousands of new jobs, incredible reductions in green house gas emissions, huge savings in energy costs, and overall lower transportation costs for users of a high speed rail system that is highly integrated with other transportation services.”

The strong need for significantly higher appropriations is illustrated by the fact the Federal Rail Administration received high speed rail applications from 24 states totaling \$50 billion this year, while just \$8 billion was made available under the stimulus. In addition to new high speed rail projects, it is vital for Congress to fully fund Amtrak in order to launch a long-delayed fleet replacement program to replace aging rail cars and equipment while contributing to the development of an American rail manufacturing base.

“Amtrak has seen ridership growth in six of the last seven years,” said Ross Capon, president of the **National Association of Railroad Passengers**. “By investing in a program to expand the national rail network, Congress can help meet this increasing

public demand, while at the same time creating thousands of good-paying U.S. manufacturing and construction jobs.”

Participants in the rally at Washington’s Union Station praised President Obama for jumpstarting a renaissance of American rail with \$8 billion under the stimulus and Congress for last year more than doubling his proposed annual appropriation to \$2.5 billion.

Intercity passenger rail accounts for only 2 percent of all Federal transportation spending. The U.S. House last year voted to allocate \$4 billion, but the Senate only agreed to \$2.5 billion. In addition, Amtrak was funded \$400 million less than requested.

“The quicker we build the system, the sooner America will enjoy the benefits,” said John Krieger, Federal Transportation Policy Analyst for **U.S. PIRG**. “High-speed rail requires long-term commitment from all levels of government, including at least \$4 billion from Congress in 2011.”

Prospects for economic and energy policy as well as Americans’ changing lifestyles point to the need to diversify the nation’s transportation infrastructure.

“The Obama administration demonstrated significant leadership on high speed rail last year, and now is the time for Congress to pick up that charge for the benefit of all Americans,” said James Corless director of the **Transportation for America Campaign**. “Transportation systems have enormous impacts on our everyday lives – from our pocket books to climate change, from our household expenses to the global economy. Americans are increasingly demanding alternative options that will make our communities more connected, more energy efficient, more equitable and healthier.”

The U.S. Joint Forces Command, under U.S. Marine General J.N. Mattis, issued a report earlier this year stating that oil demand could outpace supply as early as 2015. The potentially devastating consequences for our economy, transportation system and national security require an urgent and important investment in high speed trains, which can be nine times more energy-efficient than cars or planes, advocates argued.

“President Obama has made high speed rail a pillar of America’s recovery and continued prosperity,” said Rick Harnish, executive director of the **Midwest High Speed Rail Association**. “Congress last year took a good first step but we must do more as oil grows scarcer and our environment grows sicker every day.”

The energy crunch and expected rise in prices is combining with congestion to limit America’s ability to meet the challenges of the future without expanding its current transportation offerings.

“Congestion is at all time highs on both our interstate and air systems” stated Daniel L. Plaughter, Executive Director of the **Southeast High Speed Rail Association** and **Virginians for High Speed Rail**. “We need to build a comprehensive, national transportation system that includes a vibrant, efficient, and accessible high speed rail system, because we are not going to pave our way out of traffic.”

The benefits of high speed rail extend to freight as well, coalition members noted.

“OneRail strongly supports robust funding to continue to move the nation's investment in high-speed and intercity passenger rail forward,” said Anne Canby, one of the founders of **OneRail**. “We also urge an integrated approach to surface transportation investment to ensure our intermodal and freight network remains strong, maximizing our competitiveness and enabling people and goods to travel by rail quickly and efficiently.”

Andy Kunz, President & CEO of the **US High Speed Rail Association**, said “We support a major ongoing investment in a 17,000 miles of high speed rail network across America. This is the single most important thing we can do as a nation to reduce our dependence on oil, address national security, cut our carbon output, and move the nation safely, swiftly and efficiently into the 21st century. This national system has the capacity to pay for itself by significantly reducing our \$700 billion per year trade deficit purchasing foreign oil. It will revitalize our cities, revive our manufacturing sectors, and be the catalyst for the next real estate boom. We need to build this as quickly as possible.”

Federal leadership is required to leverage local support and resources, said Rob Simpson, President and CEO of the **Metropolitan Development Association of Central New York** and Representative for the High Speed Rail New York Coalition.

"As we continue to mobilize within New York State to ensure we have the necessary capacity to successfully develop High Speed Rail service, we need the federal government to continue their already commendable commitment to this initiative," said Simpson. "Though we must continue to identify state and private funding partners, the support of the federal government is crucial to the success of this project on a state and national level."

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