



REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE ALLAN RUTTER
ADMINISTRATOR

HIGH-SPEED GROUND TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION

MAY 23, 2002

Thank you for inviting me here to sunny Florida to spend some time with ya'll today. It sure feels great to get out of Washington and be here with you.

And, to be perfectly candid, it feels pretty good to talk about something other than Amtrak for a change.

This being the first chance I've had to address this group as FRA Administrator, I thought I would give you a little background on myself before making some observations which I'm sure ya'll are dying to hear.

My wife and I along with our two teenage daughters moved to Washington from Texas a little more than a year ago; and let me just say we're having a ball!

While we very much miss Texas (and really miss Texas food), I wouldn't trade the opportunity to do what I'm doing for the world.

Change is rarely easy...and with it comes both challenges and opportunities.

Obviously one of the greatest challenges to date has been learning how to get things done in Washington.

Secretary Mineta has put together a really impressive team – so good in fact that I often find myself in meetings looking around the room asking why am I here.

Some of the team many of you already know - Michael Jackson, Jeff Shane and Emil Frankel, just to mention a few.

And outside of the DOT, I get to work with some very dedicated people within the Administration, who have been devoting a lot of time thinking about passenger rail issues in the past year. I'd mention them by name, but you only

gave me so many minutes in your program.

As the fourth FRA Administrator to address this group, I'd like to personally thank all of you for what you do to advance passenger and high-speed rail.

Obviously, passenger rail, if done right, has the potential to play a critical role in our nation's transportation future.

Those of you who know me know that I used to run the wildly popular, albeit unsuccessful Texas High-Speed Rail project. As a matter of fact, it was in that capacity that I attended my only other HSGTA meeting, in Anaheim, California in 1991.

Now this particular HSR experience could be can be good thingor it could be a bad thingdepending upon where you sit.

Bad in that we were not successful in bringing high-speed rail to Texas.

Good though in that I have a pretty good sense for what went right and what went wrong...

I'm a firm believer in the idea that failure offers tremendous opportunities for improvement. It's certainly been the case in my own professional career!

Before I continue, I would like to make apologies in advance for my nomenclature. I understand that the name of this organization envisions that all in this room have an abiding interest in high-speed ground transportation, not simply high-speed rail. However, in the interests of saving consonants and therefore saving time, I will use the term "high-speed rail" even though I know it might make some of you wince.

So, with that in mind, let me make some observations on issues of the day.

Reauthorization and Partnerships

Secretary Mineta has made it clear in no uncertain terms that we in the Department are "**One DOT**", working together for a common goal.

The Secretary's approach to TEA-21 Reauthorization is a perfect example of this approach.

What Secretary Mineta has done is set up intra-DOT teams representing staff from throughout DOT. These folks have been identifying key issues and programmatic options.

Over the next few months, the Department will be working with other agencies, stakeholders and Congressional committees to shape reauthorization legislation.

As for our piece of the pie, I have been meeting on a regular basis with my counterparts at the other modal administrations to discuss ways we can preserve flexibility, promote productivity, and improve the safety, security and efficiency of our surface transportation system; a system in which all of you play such an important role.

You should know that we have been meeting with key constituencies getting their input on what we should or shouldn't be thinking about as we move forward.

While I can't tell you the details of what will or will not be included in any proposed legislation, I can tell you that the Secretary has made it clear that he's committed to delivering a comprehensive DOT reauthorization bill to the Congress next February when the President submits his Budget.

Clearly though, for any major piece of legislation to be successful, we need to make sure Federal plans are linked closely with state transportation plans. To do otherwise, in my opinion, would be foolish.

That said, for too long, we in the high-speed rail game have talked about taking high-speed rail to the next level.

Usually, that's been equated with going after and getting federal funding. The fact is that while absolutely essential – money isn't everything!

I submit to you that the greater challenge is making high-speed rail work in today's environment.

So what do I mean by that?

- Fitting high-speed rail into existing corridors;
- Integrating new technology like positive train control into high-speed operations; and
- Working out the always tough issue of liability.

Until high-speed rail advocates find a way to address these and other challenges, we won't be able to spend any Congressional dollars we might get this year or in the future.

For those of you who have been closely following developments on the Hill, you should be encouraged by the fact that a couple of influential Subcommittees have put forth legislation that among other things, would make more money available for high-speed rail.

But a reality check folks -- even if one or all of these measures pass, the challenge of putting appropriations behind the authorizations still remains.

Another related observation is that it's clear to me from my Texas experience that a purely federally driven model doesn't work where passenger rail, and high-speed in particular, is concerned.

Throughout the country, we've witnessed a bunch of successful passenger projects -- be it on the highways, in the air, or in many of our cities where mass transit is helping alleviate the growing problem of highway congestion.

And what do they all have in common? Simple. None of them are run by the Federal government!

Let me say that again...none of them are run by the Federal government!

For example, while the Federal Highway Administration provides guidance on the standards to be used in developing highways and a portion of the required capital funds, it's states and local governments that make the fundamental decisions on where the highways will be built, when they will be built and what they will look like. Not the federal government.

Many successful forms of transportation, such as highways, also rely heavily on the private sector to provide the innovation and flexible skills required to determine how and where service is provided on a specific piece of infrastructure.

One only has to look to the success of intercity passenger rail in Virginia, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington State to see many of the same characteristics at work.

No question about it. These states are carefully are preparing for the future. Others, unfortunately, are not as far along.

Buying train sets or new passenger cars alone won't cut it. Investment in infrastructure including signal systems and track are arguably more important -- though I recognize less sexy -- than rolling stock.

Nonetheless, they are necessary investments for the future.

Frankly, the way I see it, our role at the FRA is more of a facilitator than a developer. We will continue to help identify cost-effective technologies and programmatic options that might be attractive to you and your partners as you continue to plan for HSR projects.

And as a facilitator, we are sometimes able to provide funding to aid in advancing your high-speed ground transportation plans. In that vein, I am very pleased today to announce two recently finalized cooperative grant agreements. The first is for the *Florida High-Speed Rail Authority* in the amount of \$3 million dollars (\$3,000,000.00); to help cover specific planning, engineering and environmental evaluation costs. The other is for 1¼ million dollars (\$1,250,000.00) for the California High-Speed Rail Authority to fund studies needed to develop a draft environmental impact statement. And while these funds are not insignificant, I want to underscore again the point that the federal government won't be running any of these systems.

A personal aside: I spent a week in Japan at the beginning of this month attending a International Railway Union conference and touring JR company facilities. As impressive as the rolling stock is, and there is remarkable variety and creativity in Japanese high-speed rail equipment, the most impressive thing about their systems is their efficiency. JR Central's Tokaido Shinkansen carries 357,000 passengers a day on 285 daily departures, with a staggering average delay of less than a minute per train!

This kind of efficiency is the result of careful infrastructure construction, diligent maintenance, sophisticated train control systems and a highly motivated workforce. Their success is not simply a matter of train sets.

The challenge for this group in taking high-speed rail to the next level is directly tied to your ability to create and foster greater partnership opportunities in delivering fully integrated high-speed rail systems.

To that end, we will continue to work with all of you in making cost-effective, high-speed rail a reality through the Next Generation High Speed Rail Program and the Maglev Deployment Program.

Business Community Support

I'd like to share another observation that on the surface might seem obvious to everyone in this room.

With limited exceptions, successful transportation development depends more on the breadth and depth of support than the actual amount of financial support or investment.

Again, harkening back to my days in Texas, our high-speed project was

largely driven by companies wanting to sell their equipment,

At the same time, local officials in cities to be served paid lip service to the concept, demonstrating an extremely shallow level of commitment. I don't blame them, for they understood that it really wasn't their project.

Once opposition surfaced from rural areas and modal competitors, any support that might have existed for the project evaporated quickly, like scoop of Blue Bell ice cream on a hot summer sidewalk.

While I don't want to paint this as the sole reason for our failure in Texas, I would without a doubt rank it high on the list.

Contrast that experience with a recent meeting between the Southeast Business Alliance and Secretary Mineta.

At that meeting, the vice chairman of Coca Cola and the regional president of Bank of America, among others, told the Secretary how important high-speed rail is to their companies and the regional economy, not to mention quality of life.

Important not only because they might benefit financially from any high-speed rail operation but that high-speed rail would provide additional mobility to help keep the Southeast competitive.

Without a doubt, this type of dialogue has been missing from the overall high-speed/passenger rail discussion.

It's this level of corporate commitment – this public/private partnership - that drives public opinion and therefore, political capital, which is so necessary in making the vision of high-speed rail systems a reality in America.

So, another challenge for this group is to make high-speed rail relevant – demonstrating the long-term benefits that can accrue from a world-class high-speed rail system and the effect it can have on addressing future regional transportation challenges. Like all other transportation projects, high-speed rail must start from the ground up.

Objectivity

Finally, may I be so bold as to suggest that high-speed rail advocates need to be realistic in their assessment of the transportation and political landscape.

Without such objectivity, passenger rail advocates will continue to take a backseat to highway, transit and aviation interests.

As you know, I had the honor of serving then-Governor Bush as his transportation policy advisor.

As part of my portfolio, I had to be knowledgeable – and more importantly – objective about the strengths and weaknesses of all modes of transportation, including freight and passenger rail.

All of the modes have their political bases from which support and funding flows. It is my opinion that high-speed advocates need to shore up their support with realistic and objective goals. You have to make your case based on something more concrete than moral equivalence.

Those of you who are parents can appreciate the limited appeal of the moral equivalence approach: “you bought Susie a new pair of jeans and didn’t buy me anything! It’s not fair!” You buy your kids clothes based on what they need, not on what’s fair. Similarly, Congress will make modal investments based on the effectiveness of those arguing for needs, not for fairness.

This kind of practical, realistic approach will be necessary if you are to translate legislation into spending.

Security

I would be remiss if I didn’t take a few minutes to switch gears and share with you what we are doing in the area of security.

In his state State of the Union address, President Bush said that his budget would support three preeminent goals for America:

- Winning the war – at home and abroad;
- Protecting our homeland; and
- reviving the economy.

As Secretary Mineta has stated, our transportation system is critical to the security of every American -- and to the nation’s economy.

Thus, the Department of Transportation will play an important role in meeting all three of the President’s goals.

Secretary Mineta and I -- along with his DOT leadership team -- believe that the President’s 2003 budget for DOT will enhance homeland security -- significantly.

More importantly, it will improve transportation safety, maintain America's critical transportation infrastructure, increase transportation capacity, protect the environment, and improve mobility. In short, it does the job.

With that as some background, I think y'all will agree that one of the greatest challenges facing the rail industry is security.

Security has taken on an urgency that was unheard of eight months ago. We are now in an era of what Secretary Mineta calls the "new normal".

To date, FRA's exercise of authority over security has been limited. For example, we issued rules on Passenger Train Emergency Preparedness that require passenger railroads to conduct detailed planning for emergency situations. All passenger and commuter railroads currently have these plans in place and they practice them with local emergency responders.

Prior to September 11th, FRA worked with the railroad industry and the DOT Crisis Management Center to establish a communications network and protocols to quickly disseminate security related information between the Federal government and the railroad industry.

So, when the unthinkable happened on Sept. 11th, the industry sprang into action.

We all have our own stories about where we were and what we were doing on September 11. I was in Chicago meeting with Phil Pagano and the folks at METRA.

Within minutes of the attacks, I saw first-hand how quickly and efficiently one railroad reacted to the events of that tragic day - converting from a morning rush schedule to an evening rush schedule to get people home safely to their loved ones.

Ya'll may be familiar with the actions we as an industry have taken since that day. On Sept. 20, I convened an industry-wide teleconference to discuss and identify what actions we needed to take to enhance security.

As a result the industry formed six critical action teams to assess the security of:

- Physical assets including bridges and tunnels;
- Information Technology systems including dispatching systems;
- Chemical and Hazardous Materials;

- Department of Defense shipments;
- Train Operations; and,
- Rail passenger systems security and human factors

The critical action teams have presented classified reports to the Office of Homeland Security and DOT's Office of Intelligence and Security concerning both near term and long term options for enhancing the security of the U.S. railroad network.

We're making sure that the work of the critical action teams is coordinated with overall DOT efforts to enhance the nation's transportation security.

Finally, we have secured the services of an independent, expert consultant who is in the process of reviewing the AAR's report.

Close

Before I leave you today, I want to mention something important to me; especially in light of the events of September 11th.

As this Memorial Day approaches, I ask that ya'll reflect on the freedoms we enjoy as Americans every day. Countless men and women have given their lives in service to our nation in order to secure these freedoms. To any of you in the audience who have served our nation or whose family members have done so, I say thank you.

I know you all agree that we owe our fallen heroes a debt of gratitude. I hope that this Memorial Day, next Monday, you will join Americans everywhere for the *National Moment of Remembrance*. As you enjoy the Memorial Day Holiday, please remember to pause for a one-minute moment of silence at 3:00pm.

Again, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to escape Washington for a day.

I look forward to spending more time with you today and in the future.

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