

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
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Transportation and Infrastructure Summit
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Good morning. On behalf of President Obama and Secretary LaHood, it's my pleasure to join you this morning.

I'd like to talk about the future of our country, our economy, and why high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail needs to be a growing part of a balanced, multimodal transportation network.

It is fundamental that no economy can ever grow faster than its transportation network can carry it. So as we look at ways to expand our economic growth we must also ensure we have the transportation capacity we will need to keep it growing long-term.

The economy has now added private sector jobs for 29 consecutive months – a total of 4.5 million jobs – with manufacturing showing the strongest growth for any 30 month period since the 1980s.

So today we have an opportunity to further accelerate our economic growth, adding jobs today, by building the strategic investments in our transportation system that will be essential to win the future.

In 1955, President Eisenhower said in a State of the Union address:

A modern, efficient highway system is essential to meet the needs of our growing population, our expanding economy, and our national security.

That was so true 60 years ago.

But today, one of the nation's most dedicated advocates for sustaining and improving America's highways, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, recognizes that highways alone will not adequately meet those needs.

As the Builders Association recently wrote, America's highways are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by demand. As important as it is to maintain them, moving forward, the key will be to integrate them into a multimodal transportation network.

They wrote:

We need a new vision of increasing prosperity and ensuring our global economic competitiveness in the 21st century by upgrading our transportation network – applying new ideas and new thinking to transportation issues.

The Road Builders are not alone in this call for change.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has also called for an end to the business-as-usual approach to funding transportation, stating that in order to support a 21st century economy, the United States needs to target high levels of investments at improving performance across all transportation modes.

As both the Chamber and Road Builders recognize – and as President Obama continues to emphasize – transportation is the bloodline of our economy, and a balanced system is our path to prosperity.

But today, our network is saddled with gridlock – and it's heavily reliant on foreign oil.

According to the Texas Transportation Institute, the average driver today spends an additional 35 hours per year stuck in traffic compared to just three decades ago.

And in the next three years alone, drivers can expect to experience an additional three hours of new delays.

Highway congestion today costs nearly \$130 billion a year and it continues to grow.

That's almost \$1,000 a year out of every commuter's pocket and results in 2.5 billion gallons of wasted fuel.

And congestion plagues our airports as well.

In 2010, airlines endured more than 120 million hours of delays and today around 20 percent of all flights are delayed.

In the meantime, Americans travel habits are evolving.

According to a 2009 National Household Travel Survey, between 2001 and 2009, the number of households without a car grew by one million.

And during the last eight years Americans have reduced their vehicles miles traveled by six percent.

Meanwhile, last year, more Americans used public transportation than in any year since 1957.

From 1995 to 2008, ridership on commuter rail, light rail, and heavy rail shot up 72 percent.

Since 2000, Amtrak's ridership is up 43 percent, with annual ridership records set eight out of the last nine years. They are on track this year to set another all-time record.

America's travel patterns are shifting particularly fast among young people.

According to a report issued recently by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group and the Frontier Group, in the last eight years, Americans ages 16 to 34 have reduced their vehicle miles traveled by 23 percent while *increasing* their average passenger miles traveled by trains and buses by a whopping 40 percent.

But this is not just about the next generation.

The Association of American Retired People has made clear that senior citizens are increasingly seeking communities that make it easier to walk places or use public transportation rather than drive. It allows them to remain active and independent as they age.

In 2009, seniors made 328 million more trips by rail and transit than they did a decade ago.

The American public understands much better than Congress what our transportation network needs to look like 10, 20 or 30 years from now.

And they understand – as President Obama has made clear – that a 21st century economy won't run on last-century transportation.

The cost of doing nothing – of maintaining the status quo – could be suffocating.

Already saddled with gridlock, by 2050 America's transportation network will have to move more than *100 million* additional people and *four billion* more annual tons of freight.

Meanwhile, with service tailored to the marketplace, rail can be the most cost-effective, least oil reliant, most environmentally friendly mode of transportation.

Two railroad tracks can carry as many passengers per hour as 16 lanes of freeway.

And while the cost of building rail compares favorably with roads, rail right-of-way only consumes a third of the land roadways require.

So when we visualize the multimodal transportation network America will need to win the future, high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail must be a part of that picture.

Consider it the longer-distance extension of a 21st century transit system, linking together densely populated cities.

Three years ago, the Administration made the largest federal investment in passenger rail in American history – signaling an end to business as usual in transportation investment.

Since 2009, more than \$12 billion has been invested in passenger rail projects. Now 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Amtrak, are moving forward with 153 projects, making high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail a reality.

At FRA, we've obligated nearly 100 percent of our funding, and are working closely with the states to ensure projects come in on time and on budget.

This year alone, 45 projects worth nearly \$3 billion in federal funding are either underway or set to break ground.

And, we've targeted our investments in some of our country's most densely populated regions, places that have perfect demographics for passenger rail growth – places where legacy transportation modes are running out of room to grow.

So let me update you on some of the progress we're seeing.

In this continent's busiest rail corridor, the Northeast Corridor, momentum is building to expand high-speed rail service to true bullet train speeds.

FRA has engaged States and stakeholders in an environmental review process that will help determine the most efficient ways to connect our nation's capital to Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

And Amtrak recently unveiled its own vision for the Northeast Corridor – one featuring 220 MPH trains with 90 minute trip times between Washington, DC and New York, and New York and Boston.

While this planning takes place, the FRA has invested more than \$3 billion in projects that are upgrading existing corridor and feeder service in the region.

For example, on the Northeast Corridor's most heavily used section, federal funding will bring improved electrical systems, signal modernizations, and upgrade track, enabling Amtrak's Acela to top speeds of 160 MPH.

Last month, California lawmakers voted to move forward with the state's first high-speed rail project, marking a watershed moment in both the state's and our country's history.

Ultimately, bullet trains will transport travelers between Los Angeles and San Francisco in less than three hours – twice as fast as the highways, which rank among the nation's most congested.

With clogged highways, the most delay-prone airports, and 7 million additional residents coming to the state in 20 years, California has to act.

The business as usual approach to create capacity equal to the high-speed rail system would require 2,000 more miles of highways and 115 airline gates at nearly double the cost.

We are also seeing great progress in the Midwest, Pacific Northwest and the Southeast, where projects are focused on expanding service, increasing reliability, and improving trip times.

With \$2.5 billion in federal investments, a vision shared by nine states called the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative is moving quickly into execution.

The plan is to connect the Midwest's 40 largest cities – more than 50 million people – with more frequent service, shorter trip times and superior on-time performance. The Midwest now has the second fastest trains in the nation, with segments at 110 MPH, and by 2015 the Midwest will have expanded 110 MPH service throughout most of its first two priority routes – Chicago-Detroit and Chicago-St. Louis.

In the Pacific Northwest, ridership along Amtrak's 450-mile long Cascades corridor has tripled since the service was introduced in the mid-1990s.

With incremental improvements now underway, the States of Washington and Oregon are pursuing a vision for regional rail service to meet this growing demand and prepare for the future by increasing daily roundtrips between Seattle and Portland from 4 to 13 and cut today's trip time by an hour.

In the Southeast, North Carolina and Virginia are making incremental improvements to increase frequencies, reduce trip times, and improve reliability as they move forward planning for high-speed passenger rail that will connect Raleigh and Washington, D.C.

Texas, the fastest growing state in the nation, is planning for the future as well – having already learned that a business-as-usual approach doesn't work.

Between 1997 and 2007, the state added roughly 1,000 more lane-miles of highway – and congestion got worse.

Today, Texas also ranks first in its number of people who commute exceptionally long distances to work.

And a survey conducted by the University of Texas has shown that support for increased intercity passenger rail is high.

So now, the South Central region is moving ahead with several planning studies that will establish a foundation for future construction.

Between Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston, 150 MPH service is being planned, with three potential routes identified.

A corridor investment plan is also being developed for intercity passenger rail connecting Oklahoma City down through Dallas/Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and through South Texas.

All of our partners understand we've set forth on a multi-generational effort.

The Interstate Highway System took 10 administrations, 28 sessions of Congress, to be completed.

But, incrementally, we got it done.

Through boom years, through bust years, through eight recessions, we built a national highway system that transformed our nation.

And our generation has reaped the benefits from this investment made by our parent's and grandparent's generation.

In turn, it is now our responsibility to now provide for the future.

Years from now, the next generation will look back on the choices we made today.

They will see we knew of the threats of climate change, and that we were aware of the crushing effects of rising fuel prices.

They will see we knew of the coming population growth, and of the debilitating effects and costs of congestion.

When they look at the choices we made, with the knowledge we had, will they see we got it right?

With the commitment of President Obama – and the efforts and vision of everyone in this room – I'm convinced the answer will be yes.

Thank you.