

**Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo**  
**Prepared Remarks**  
**International Union of Railways (UIC)**  
**High-Level Round Table**  
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Good evening, everyone, and thank you for the gracious welcome.

On behalf of President Obama and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, it is truly an honor to join you.

In July, the United States had the pleasure of welcoming UIC members – including some of you in this room – to the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress on High-Speed Rail, the first UIC World Congress ever held in North America.

For the U.S. Department of Transportation, July's Congress was a great opportunity for us to learn from you – the world leaders on high-speed rail. We also saw it as a great opportunity to discuss with UIC our vision for high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail in the United States – and to share with you our sense of forward momentum.

As we explained then, the Obama Administration's unprecedented support for rail – which includes the largest federal investments ever made in high-speed rail and higher-performing intercity passenger rail – has made it possible for us to partner with 32 states to guide our vision from the drawing board to reality.

I'm here today to continue our discussion – about our vision, about our priorities, and about our commitment as we move forward.

In our country – and I know in yours – railroads have played a fundamental role in unlocking economic potential.

In the early 1800s, the United States' economy was constrained by the vast distances between cities. At that time, our economy could grow no faster – and grow no further – than the distance a horse could walk in a day.

But in 1862, in the midst of our civil war, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation that started construction of a transcontinental railroad. There was considerable opposition. Critics said the nation was in too much turmoil – that the project was too risky, too costly. But seven years later, with the driving of one final spike, there was the foundation for a truly national economy.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the flourishing of the interstate highway system and commercial air travel, America's focus shifted away from moving people by rail. While our freight rail network remained world class, our passenger rail network became the forgotten mode. Those days are now over.

Making way for rail's renaissance in America is now a priority at the federal, state, and local levels.

Today, our President, our Vice President, the U.S. Department of Transportation, departments of transportation at the state and local levels, governors, mayors, civic leaders – everyone agrees that a modern rail network is not a luxury: It is a necessity – a vital part of a balanced, multimodal transportation network.

Here's why: By 2050, America's transportation network will need to move more than 100 million additional people and 4 billion more annual tons of freight. But today, our highways and airports are stretched close to their limits – and the cost of our over-reliance on them continues to grow. The cost of congestion is now close to \$130 billion a year – a 500% percent increase over a 30-year period.

In the face of these challenges, the efficiencies of rail simply cannot be ignored. With service levels targeted to the market, rail can be the most cost-effective, least oil-reliant, and most environmentally friendly mode to move people and freight.

Likewise, we simply cannot ignore the fact that Americans' travel habits are evolving.

It has been said that America has too much of a car culture to embrace trains. But over the last eight years, Americans have actually driven less, while using passenger rail and public transit in record numbers.

These patterns are shifting fastest among young people.

In an eight-year period starting in 2001, young people reduced their vehicle miles traveled by 23 percent and increased their average passenger miles traveled by rail and buses by a whopping 40 percent. Our national passenger railroad, Amtrak, has set ridership records in nine of the last 10 years, with ridership growing close to 50 percent since 2000. And according to a national survey conducted by the American Public Transportation Association, nearly two-thirds of Americans – and close to three quarters of young people – say they are likely to travel by high-speed rail.

This is the future we're preparing for.

And right now, with our initial investments, we are focused on three key priorities:

- Managing and executing high-quality projects
- Laying a foundation for sustainable long-term passenger rail improvements
- And advancing market-based service improvements

Our initial investments have targeted America's most densely populated regions – areas that are ripe for passenger rail growth – with service types tailored to the distinct needs of each market.

This includes three tiers of service.

For the most densely populated markets, we're planning for high-speed express trains moving at 150 to 220 MPH (*240 to 350 kilometers per hour*). In mid-level markets, we're planning for regional express trains to move at speeds of 90 to 125 MPH (*145 to 200 kilometers per hour*). And for smaller communities, we're planning for emerging services moving at speeds of 79 to 90 MPH (*127 to 145 kilometers per hour*) that will connect people to the broader network.

But the growth of our passenger rail network cannot come at the expense of our freight network.

Our entire rail network needs to grow – and we believe that increasing rail's share of the intermodal freight market has enormous public benefits. So in planning for passenger rail projects, we have worked closely with states and host freight railroads to forge win-win agreements that deliberately consider freight railroads' long-term needs.

Let me talk more now about our vision.

In getting started, we see at least two world-class markets for us to develop true high-speed rail.

One market is in California, America's most populous state, which will break ground next year on a high-speed rail system that will carry travelers between the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco at 220 MPH (*350 kilometers per hour*).

In terms of total travel time, California's high-speed rail line will be competitive with air travel and more than twice as fast as today's trip by auto.

In California, the need is clear.

The state has 37 million residents, and will add 7 million more over the next 20 years. Already, the state has the busiest short-haul air travel market; the most delayed airports; and six of America's most congested metropolitan areas. To build a transportation system capable of sustaining long-term growth – or the equivalent transportation capacity of high-speed rail – California would need to build more than 2,000 miles of highways and 115 airline gates.

High-speed rail is much less expensive. And in a state where portions of the interstate highway system are already 26 lanes wide – and visible from space – widening highways and expanding airports hardly seems possible, let alone practical.

We also have a world-class rail market in America's Northeast.

With a population approximately the same as Spain's, this region is home to 51 million people, one in seven Americans – and is expected to add 7 million more residents by 2040.

It's also home to the Northeast Corridor, a 457-mile rail (*735-kilometer*) line that connects our nation's capital to major cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. The corridor's high-speed service – Amtrak's Acela – dominates the region's air-rail market.

Our investments in the Northeast Corridor are aimed at both its immediate and long-term needs.

We are leading a comprehensive planning effort to define the Northeast Corridor's next generation of rail services – true high-speed rail. But we've also invested more than \$3 billion in a variety of projects that will address immediate capacity needs and upgrade infrastructure, some of which is a century old.

On the corridor's most heavily used section, projects are underway to eliminate bottlenecks, upgrade track, replace catenary, and modernize signals – all while laying a foundation for expanding high-speed rail.

Now, in other markets – the Pacific Northwest, the Southeast, and the Midwest – we're focused on making significant upgrades to existing passenger rail lines.

The exploding demand for passenger rail I mentioned earlier is a national phenomenon – one seen in ridership increases in communities all across America.

And while true high-speed rail might not be right for every market, it is vital for us to increase capacity on these popular lines so they're ready for future demand, and make service on them competitive, if not superior, to regional air and highway travel

The Pacific Northwest is a growing region that today has the nation's 7<sup>th</sup> busiest rail line – the demand for which has tripled since its introduction in the mid-1990s.

With our investments, the States of Washington and Oregon are pursuing a vision for regional rail service to ultimately increase roundtrips between Seattle and Portland from 4 to 13 and cut today's trip time by an hour.

In the Southeast and Midwest, based on states' comprehensive planning efforts, we're now making upgrades for higher-performing intercity passenger rail that is faster than any service offered by the regions' market today, that will offer superior reliability and on-time performance, and that will dramatically cut current trip times

The goal in these regions is to connect key economic centers with 110 MPH service (*180 kilometers per hour*), and to upgrade stations into intermodal transit hubs.

The Midwest is home to 50 million people. And it envisions having this faster service connect its 40 largest cities, with Chicago, America's third most populous city, serving as it hub.

This year the region was able to introduce 110 MPH service (*180 kilometers per hour*) on its first two priority routes: Chicago-Detroit and Chicago-St. Louis. And by 2015, 110 MPH (*180 kilometers per hour*) service will be expanded throughout the majority of both routes, cutting close to an hour off both of the total trip times. Future improvements will nearly double the number of roundtrips, and cut trip times even more.

In the Southeast, the States of North Carolina and Virginia are moving forward to speed up service connecting Washington, D.C. to Raleigh with 110 MPH (*180 kilometers per hour*) service.

The Southeast's population is exploding, and is home to some of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas. One of those areas includes Raleigh, where city leaders see higher-performing rail service as a spark for the city's economic development efforts.

A key priority for them is to improve business travel between their city and D.C., two cities roughly as far apart as London and Paris.

We realize that we have a long way to go in our efforts. But the work being accomplished today is transformative.

More than 6,000 miles of rail corridors are being constructed or improved. More than 40 train stations are being upgraded. And 45 State rail plans have either been completed or are underway, establishing a long-term vision for progress.

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

They will see we knew 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 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, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and our state partners – and with the commitment and vision of everyone here in this room – I'm convinced the answer will be yes.

Thank you.