

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Virginians for High-Speed Rail
20th Anniversary Meeting
Richmond, Virginia
June 20, 2014

Greetings, everyone. I appreciate this opportunity to meet with all of you today – as Virginians for High Speed Rail celebrate 20 years as an organization.

Let me also acknowledge State Senator John Watkins – Virginia’s chair of the Virginia-North Carolina High-Speed Rail Compact.

Virginia’s transportation bill passed because the Senator championed it. And one of the reasons this is such a significant achievement is that it creates a fund dedicated to intercity passenger rail improvements.

Over the next five years – according to a report your organization put out – this rail fund will provide about a quarter-billion dollars for Virginia to invest in its rail system.

And what this bill achieves – providing rail with predictable, dedicated funding in your state – is exactly what Secretary Foxx and I are fighting to achieve at the federal level through the GROW AMERICA Act.

The GROW AMERICA Act is a four-year, \$302 billion transportation bill that would invest \$19 billion in a high-performing rail system.

But our proposal does even more than that. For the first time ever – it will provide rail with predictable, dedicated federal funding.

And for the Southeast High-Speed Rail network – this would be a game-changer.

It would create parity for rail with other transportation modes and help balance the region’s transportation system.

And it would set the stage for a powerful Southeast rail network connecting cities in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia into Washington, DC and the

Northeast Corridor, with service that is safer, faster, more reliable, and more frequent, serving multiple, overlapping travel markets.

And so, before I talk more about our proposal, I have to put forth a challenge.

My challenge is to expand and better solidify your vision as a broader, more regional one.

Bring Georgia and South Carolina's elected officials, state leaders, and business community into your planning and decision-making process – and your advocacy efforts.

In the Midwest, a multi-state planning effort called the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative is the reason 110 MPH service is now expanding rapidly.

It is a unified vision for eight states.

Similar multi-state efforts are now shaping a vision in the Northeast Corridor for meeting future demand. And for the Southeast to succeed, the states must be unified and coordinated in their efforts. Your vision must extend from Washington, DC, all the way to Atlanta.

Advancing a higher-performing passenger rail system – one with service speeds and frequencies that meet the needs of the marketplace – is the next generation of transportation for our country.

Long-term, our country – and this region – simply can't afford not to build it.

By the year 2050, 100 million more people will need to use our surface transportation system.

This equals the combined population of our four most populous states: California, Texas, New York, and Florida.

And much of this growth will occur in the Southeast – in the major metropolitan areas the Southeast High-Speed Rail Network would serve.

Virginia's population growth is out-pacing the nation's. A University of Virginia research group projects upwards of 25 percent growth through 2040, with the vast

majority of this growth happening in the Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Hampton Roads areas.

Moving further south along the corridor, Forbes recently ranked Raleigh as America's 2nd fastest-growing city, ranked Charlotte 8th, and Atlanta 12th.

Another recent study – this one by the United States Conference of Mayors – looked at metro areas in the year 2042.

And one of the study's chief findings was that metropolitan areas are going to grow much faster in the South than in any other part of the country: absorbing more than 50 percent of the population growth that occurs in the nation's major metro areas during this period.

So the Southeast is growing, changing – it's booming.

So imagine the consequences of failing to build a transportation system that can move these travelers safely, reliably, and efficiently.

Imagine the negative impact this failure would have on economic growth, on commute times, on quality of life.

Because, if we return to a decades-long pattern of under-investing in our rail system, and continue to over-rely on other transportation modes, we are going to come up short.

In 2012, the Texas Transportation Institute calculated the cost of highway congestion at \$121 billion per year.

It found that commuters in the Richmond area, and in Raleigh, are devoting about a day each year to sitting in traffic – at a personal cost of more than \$500 each.

In Atlanta – also home to the busiest airport in the country – it's much worse.

In the face of these challenges, rail can be the most cost-effective, least oil-reliant, most environmentally-friendly means of moving people.

Two railroad tracks can carry as many people in an hour as 16 lanes of freeway – all while allowing passengers a higher level of productivity and convenience.

But it is not just our economy – the need for more transportation capacity – that requires rail to play a larger role in our transportation system.

The people, themselves, are the ones changing travel in this country.

The two-car household – while it still exists – is no longer the average.

Teens are applying for drivers' licenses at a decreasing rate. And the average vehicle miles traveled per person has now declined for nine straight years.

Last year, Americans took a record 10.7 billion trips by public transportation.

And Amtrak's ridership is now growing faster than any other major travel mode – 40 percent over the past decade – with new ridership records set in 10 out of the last 11 years.

In Virginia – just since 2009 – you have seen close to a 100 percent increase in ridership on your regional trains.

And in North Carolina, the Piedmont service between Charlotte and Raleigh – as it continues to set ridership records – is proof that as you offer more service people will ride it.

The Piedmont service carried about 100,000 more people in 2013 than it did in 2009.

So this is the future we must prepare for.

And this is the future – through our High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program, through our RRIF loan program, through TIGER grants – that we've started preparing for.

In the Southeast corridor, we have invested \$736 million in projects that are increasing capacity and improving service.

They're laying a stronger foundation for the Southeast High-Speed Rail Network to become a reality.

In addition to these projects, the blueprint for this network will arise out of the planning efforts our program has funded, and that are now moving forward.

These planning efforts are looking at improving service from Washington, D.C., to Richmond, to Raleigh by speeding up trains to 110 MPH.

In addition to that, we are working with Georgia DOT to study higher-performing service between Atlanta and Charlotte.

The rail projects we've been able to fund – in the Southeast and nationwide – have, or soon will, provide upgraded service to 24 million more Americans.

Still, the fact remains, in too many places we just haven't made the investments in quality passenger rail service travelers deserve: adding more service, increasing reliability, improving connections, and reducing trip times.

Congress has not funded our program since 2010, so an enormous pipeline of projects has only gotten even more backed up.

And, unless we change the way we fund transportation in this country, states like Virginia – states that have a vision, are doing good planning, and are ready to match a federal-state rail partnership – won't have a reliable federal partner to work with over the long term.

In other words, the great plans for rail service in the Southeast that you are advancing today will remain just that: plans.

GROW AMERICA will help solve these challenges.

It will invest in both a Current Passenger Rail Service Program and a Rail Service Improvement Program.

The Current Passenger Rail program will fully fund Amtrak, ensure a state of good repair system-wide, replace obsolete equipment, and bring stations into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Rail Service Improvement Program will provide \$9.5 billion to address rail service development, improve existing corridors, and strengthen regional connections.

It would provide grants to build new corridors, improve existing corridors, and address chokepoints that delay passenger services.

And it provides us authority to establish Regional Rail Development Authorities – working with state governors – to better plan for and build regional visions for enhanced rail services.

And these Authorities would be eligible to receive grants.

All of you in this room have helped to change the conversation about passenger rail transportation in this country.

Five years ago, there was no intercity passenger rail development program. There was no real way to support good state and grassroots rail planning.

And today, while challenges remain – like securing predictable, dedicated funding needed to build the Southeast High-Speed Rail Network – we have a remarkable story to tell: a story of cities and communities revitalized by expanded rail options, new stations.

Over the past five years, we have seen a 30-mile extension of track in Maine create business for 53 companies in 20 different states.

And the arrival of that new service – and the reopening of its train station in a town called Brunswick – brought with it \$20 million worth of investment in commercial and residential development.

In Normal, Illinois, a new station DOT funded – combined with our investments in 110 MPH service – provided a one-two punch in the form of \$200 million in private investments in their city center.

In Denver, Colorado, a revitalized Denver Union Station has served as the catalyst for a billion dollars' worth of new development, creating what is now Denver's hottest new neighborhood.

Now the planning is moving forward and the infrastructure is being built – like a brand new Union Station in Raleigh – to prepare the Southeast for this new era of passenger rail.

So, imagine being able to travel by train from here to D.C., or here to Raleigh, in less than two hours.

Imagine expanded regional routes: here to Charlotte. Lynchburg, to Roanoke, to Bristol. Petersburg to LaCrosse.

Imagine connecting the powerful economies of Washington, DC, Richmond, Raleigh, Charlotte and Atlanta.

You *have* imagined it. It's yours; it's this state, this region's vision.

And if Congress supports the GROW AMERICA Act, together we can make this vision a reality.

So keep telling your story about the impact the Southeast High-Speed Rail Network could have on your businesses – and what it could mean for jobs and economic competitiveness.

Keep working on solidifying your regional efforts to galvanize behind a unified vision.

And make the call on Congress to provide a predictable federal funding partner to make the Southeast High-Speed Rail Network a reality.

Thanks very much. I look forward to your questions.