

TESTIMONY

OF

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CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER
CORPORATION
60 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20002**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON RAILROADS, PIPELINES
AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

OF THE

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2009
2:00 P.M.**

2167 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

(Slide 0)

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to testify today on the opportunities and challenges of high speed intercity passenger rail in America. As the former mayor of a small Illinois college town that was heavily dependent on Amtrak for its mobility needs, I know the opportunities rail networks offer to communities that wish to develop the livable urban structure and transportation solutions they need for growth. Amtrak is ideally positioned to address those needs.

I would like to recognize our colleagues here at the table, particularly Administrator Szabo. We fully support the Administration's vision for high-speed rail, and we have strong partnerships with the states, the Federal Railroad Administration and the freight railroads. We are positioning ourselves aggressively to be the intercity provider of choice, and I would like to talk a bit about the expertise that underpins that strategy before I turn to a discussion of the challenges and opportunities.

(Slide 1)

These photos were taken on our Northeast Corridor, and illustrate something important – Amtrak *is* a high speed rail provider. More than half of our daily trains exceed 100mph. Our system is the successful product of decades of development aimed at accelerating service on existing right-of-way. It is a unique system that mixes high speed *Acela* and Regional trains with commuter and freight service to provide a broad range of public benefits.

(Slide 2)

When people use the term “high-speed rail,” this is what they have in mind: very fast trains running on brand-new, grade-separated, arrow-straight rights of way. This is one of the very successful AVE services in Spain, which operate at 186 mph.

(Slide 3)

Here’s a slightly different picture. This is the NEC, and you can see an Amtrak *Acela* train on a bridge built in 1835, although it now carries 125 mph trains. Here you see the difference between these two approaches: they design the infrastructure to realize the potential of the equipment, we design the equipment to operate within the constraints of the infrastructure.

(Slide 4)

Both have their merits. Development of high speed service on the NEC began in the early 1960s, shortly after the Japanese inaugurated their first “bullet train.” Successful high speed services of all kinds are built on incremental improvements, but whatever the approach, the constraining factors are the same – cost and environmental impact.

(Slide 5)

Here’s a comparison of two contemporary high speed projects. On the left, we have Amtrak’s Harrisburg line, which underwent a round of incremental investment and improvement that culminated with the introduction of 110 mph service in 2006. On the right, we see the brand new Madrid to Valladolid high speed line, finished in 2007 and

designed to carry trains at 186 mph. This comparison highlights the importance of relating the investment to benefits – we want to make sure we get as much return as we can for our money – and we want to do it in a timely manner.

(Slide 6)

The NEC has undergone several rounds of incremental improvement since 1976. On the right, you see the results in terms of the travel market we share with all of the airlines. We have also invested in other corridors – putting in a PTC system on the Amtrak-owned Michigan line, and laying the groundwork for 110 mph service on our St. Louis to Chicago line. Amtrak wants more high-speed rail, but we always need to remember that the goal is a competitive trip time. Sometimes, that means raising speeds from 79mph to 110mph; sometimes, it means raising speeds from 110mph to 150 mph – and it can also mean the development of much higher speeds, where we need them to be competitive.

(Slide 7)

This slide breaks out the funding programs from ARRA, which will finance the next round of development. These grant programs are a tremendous first step, but we will definitely need to develop long-term funding streams to support future needs. The High-Speed Rail Initiative Chairman Oberstar proposed would be a potential source of funding, and we strongly support this program.

(Slide 8)

We have partnered with the states to apply for ARRA funding; this slide highlights some of the major Track 2 projects. Some will be new services. We have also applied for funding to improve service and speed up trains on existing routes. Projects to increase frequencies and install PTC will improve capacity and trip times. Equipment is a vital need, and we are working with vendors, the FRA, and our state partners to develop specifications and funding plans for new equipment procurement.

(Slide 9)

Amtrak will deliver. We must help our nation retain its economic competitiveness, and communities and transportation are vital components of that. We are eager to develop the partnerships that will make these projects possible, and I look forward to working closely with the states and the FRA as we build the foundation for a generation of economic growth and prosperity.