

TESTIMONY OF

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DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR LOCAL AND AREA TRANSPORTATION
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

REGARDING

REFORMING FEDERAL RAIL PROGRAMS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON RAILROADS PIPELINES AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Under the right circumstances, high speed rail attracts riders and offers the nation a viable transportation option as we face the challenges of dealing with climate change and looking for alternatives to imported oil.

In Pennsylvania, we completed a commitment to partner with Amtrak on a \$145 million improvement to the 104-mile Keystone Corridor between Philadelphia and the state capital, Harrisburg.

The improvements, completed in 2006, included 128-miles of continuous-welded rail, more than 200,000 concrete ties, 52 new switches and the first upgrade to the signal and electrification system in 70 years and allow us to operate trains at a maximum speed of 110 mph – the fastest in the US outside the Northeast Corridor.

The express travel time between Philadelphia and Harrisburg was cut to 90 minutes – a 30 minute improvement. That is a far better travel time than by car, which is anywhere between 2 hours and 20 minutes to three hours depending on traffic. Passengers using the Keystone Corridor avoid one of our most congested expressways – Interstate 76, the Schuylkill Expressway, into Philadelphia.

Riders also responded to these improvements. Since 2006, ridership on the Keystone Corridor has improved by 45 percent. The line provided service to 1.2 million riders last year.

These Keystone Corridor improvements represent a first step toward building a truly national intercity high speed rail network. We have more to do in Pennsylvania, but we cannot do more without a strong partnership with the federal government.

Twenty years later, many of the Pennsylvania Stations owned by Amtrak and the federal government do not meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Much of the infrastructure is still over 80 years old and is in desperate need of replacement to be in a state of good repair.

Critics say Intercity and high speed rail is too expensive and a waste of resources. They could not be more incorrect.

Again, in the right places, such as along the Northeast Corridor, the Keystone Corridor and other high density corridors around the nation, an investment in high-speed rail makes tremendous sense and can give the nation real, workable transportation options for the future.

In the Northeast Corridor, where Amtrak's Acela trains are capable of reaching 150 mph, intercity rail has a 50 percent market share of the riders. This offers a glimpse of what properly sited high speed rail can accomplish.

The United States must address unmet transportation needs. Both transportation funding and program structure need reform in Washington. The United States has fallen far behind many other developed nations in terms of infrastructure investments – and passenger rail is a glaring example. Other nations dwarf our rail investment. Germany's federal government gives its states nearly \$9 billion a year for rail projects. France spends 20 times more per capita on rail than the U.S.

High speed and intercity rail programs are about connecting high density city areas, and doing so promotes higher levels of sustainability. In Pennsylvania, our population over the last decade has grown by less than 1 percent, but our increase in developed land exceeds 50 percent. We simply must take a different course.

It is important to note that the federal dollars we are talking about for high speed rail are for capital – the cost of building these systems. States and cities are going to have to address how they are willing to pay the cost of operating these systems. In Pennsylvania, we have made those choices and in this fiscal year, committed more than \$9 million to pay for operating costs on the Keystone Corridor. These systems cannot pay for themselves. Some tough local and state decisions must be made to make an intercity/high speed rail a reality.

Many states including Pennsylvania are struggling with the new federal requirements under Section 209 of PRIIA to allocate costs to corridors less than 500 miles in length. This law will push operating costs of Amtrak on to states like ours that will require us to pay 4 to 5 times what we are paying now for the same service we now receive. In the case of our corridor, Amtrak owns both the Northeast Corridor and the Keystone Corridor Infrastructure. States like ours have little to no choice in paying the cost structure of a federally owned private company, but have no say in labor contracts, overhead spending decisions or work practices. I have several quotes up on my office wall that I renew every day with. One is used a lot by Albert Einstein "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

We cannot ignore investing in our rail infrastructure and expect that someday, we will emerge with the best system in the world. We also can't bury ourselves in bureaucracy that slow down projects and system development. We must make smart investments that have a good return on investment.

We need private sector involvement and we must recognize that it is going to require a significant investment over decades in both our passenger and rail freight networks. Passenger

rail programs need to be mainstreamed into Transportation Reauthorization. They do not need a separate title.

We also need to eliminate the overlapping authority for NEPA clearance. Every modal administration within USDOT deals with NEPA differently. If one federal agency within USDOT provides NEPA clearance then the others should accept it, not have to reapprove causing time delays and added cost.

In the case of passenger rail, we need to learn from the rest of the world and separate infrastructure ownership from operations so we can effectively introduce competition and innovation.

What makes intercity/high speed rail successful? People want to use transportation systems that are frequent, reliable, cost affordable, and that are time competitive. Beyond the Keystone Corridor and Northeast Corridor, Pennsylvania does not currently have passenger rail services that meet those requirements.
