HIGH SPEED RAIL POSITION PAPER BLET

Introduction

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) represents 39,000 active locomotive engineers and trainmen on Class I, Class II, Class III, Passenger and Commuter railroads around the country. The BLET, formerly the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, was founded in 1863 in Marshall, Michigan, and has been representing the interests of railroad workers for 146 years. On December 5, 2003, BLE members overwhelmingly voted to ratify a merger with the Teamsters. The merger took effect on January 1, 2004, creating the IBT Rail Conference and formally changing the name of BLE to BLET. The BLET is the founding member of the IBT Rail Conference.

Since the founding of our organization, we have been at the forefront of technological adaptation of the railroad industry and hope to continue to be so as the industry moves towards high speed rail in this nation.

Transportation As We Know It

The Interstate Highway System was authorized by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. It had been lobbied for by major U.S. automobile manufacturers and championed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Since then, we have spent billions building and maintaining one of the best highway systems in the world. The Interstate Highway system cost $114 billion and took 35 years to complete. In today's dollars, the system would cost $426 billion.

However, times have changed. In 1955, there were 65 million vehicles on U.S. highways. Today there are over 246 million. It is projected that by the year 2055, there will be at least 400 million vehicles on our highway system. Congestion on our nation's roadways is in a terrible state and will only get worse as our population grows. It is projected that by the year 2020, 90% of urban interstates will either be at or over capacity. Between 1995 and 2001, commute times over the same distance on U.S. highways increased 10%. The Texas Transportation Institute says that $63 billion was wasted due to traffic congestion because of time lost and fuel used in 2005. Passenger miles on highways also increased 18.1 % between 1997 and 2004.

Anyone who has flown recently knows the problems in our nation's airports – flight delays and cancellations, lost luggage, overcrowded planes. Only 82% of commercial flights were on time in February 2009 and most of these delays occurred because of overcrowded airspace along the East Coast.

The Case for High Speed Rail

The impact on the environment could be lessened by switching from the current transportation strategy to one which will allow us to rely upon the benefits of mass transportation and inter-modal freight movement through High Speed Rail corridors. This system would be clean, affordable, and reliable. It would offer many benefits which would allow the U.S. to become less dependent on foreign oil. According to the

Transportation Energy Data Book, published by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in 2005, domestic airlines on average consumed 20.5% more energy per passenger-mile than Amtrak, while cars consumed 27.2% more than Amtrak. Looking at the other way around, Amtrak consumes 17.0% and 21.4% less energy per passenger-mile than airlines and cars, respectively. [One passenger-mile is one passenger traveling one mile.] Increasing the speed of trains increases their energy efficiency even further.

The solution to our transportation problems is not to build more roads or fly more planes. In essence, there is no reason why this country could not use the examples of the past in which our nation's highway infrastructure (which has a minimum speed of 45 mph) and airline structures were developed through the use of federal and state funds and apply them to our future -- creating a high speed rail system which will accommodate passenger train operations up to 125 mph and inter-modal freight train movements at speeds greater than 70 mph.

As a transportation medium, rail networks date back to 1827. Many of those original lines are still in use today, nearly 200 years later. When considering the total cost of maintaining a rail network versus the inter-state freeway system, rail costs pennies on the dollar. Any investment into a passenger rail network could pay dividends for centuries to come.

History has shown, if you build passenger rail or increase passenger service in an area, ridership will also increase. In the 38 years since Amtrak was created in 1971, ridership has increased from 6,450,304 at its formation to the record level of 28.7 million passengers in fiscal year 2008. Fiscal year 2008 represented its six straight year of record ridership. When Amtrak added two state-financed round-trips between St. Louis and Chicago and one apiece between from Quincy and Carbondale to the Windy City, ridership spiked by 189,823 for the first two-thirds of the next Fiscal Year (2007), bringing the total passenger count in the state to 670,605. The same pattern held true in California. Just months after eight trains were added to the state-subsidized Amtrak service between Sacramento and the Bay Area, ridership on the 170-mile service now with 32 trains was nearly 1.3 million in 2005, nearly triple the 460,000 passengers who rode those rails eight years previous.

Current Projects

The funding in both the stimulus and the FY09 omnibus bill has enabled municipalities, states and multi-state compacts to apply for funding for commuter and high speed rail projects.

Among the projects in the development stages are the California high speed rail projects which will run north and south through the state. Voters in the state voted for a $9 billion bond measure in November to develop the corridor. Also under consideration is a high speed rail line from Las Vegas to Los Angeles.

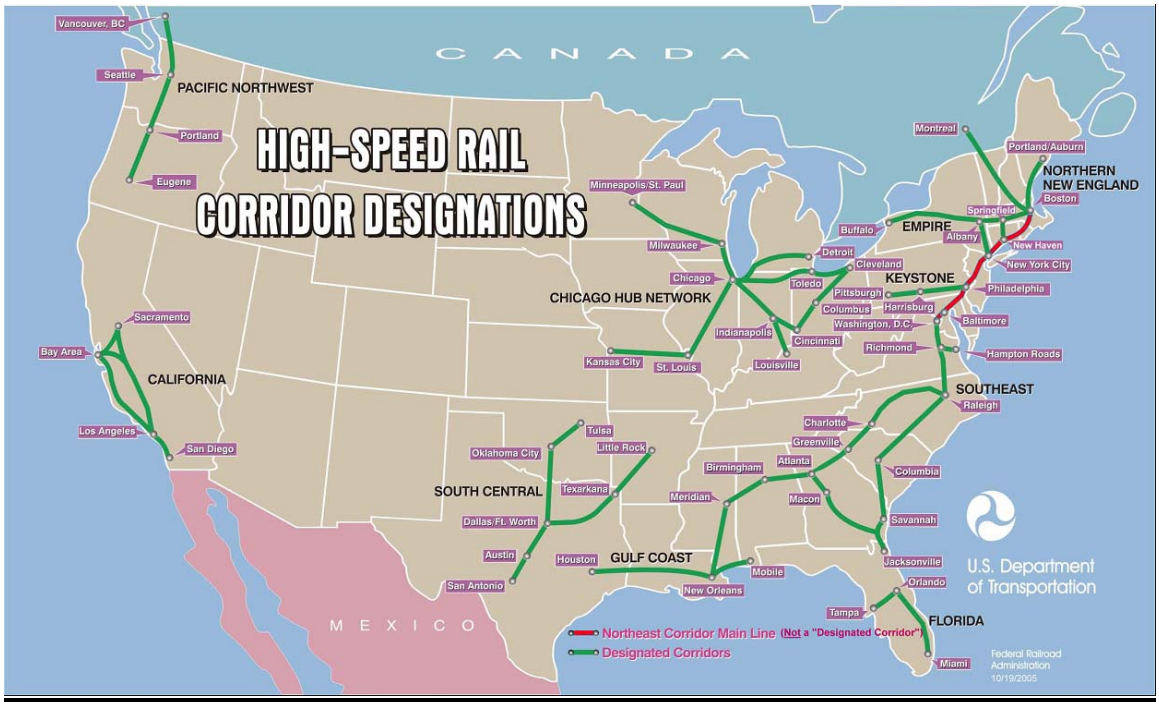
Another corridor that is receiving state funding is the 3 C (Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati) corridor in Ohio which received funds in the most recent Ohio Department of Transportation budget.

The State of Florida hopes to use stimulus funds to develop a high speed line between Walt Disney World and Orlando International Airport.

Many other states hope to use funding to create or improve commuter rail lines, including New Jersey, Minnesota and Illinois.

There are 11 federally designated high speed rail corridors:

- the Northeast Corridor (Boston to Washington, D.C.);
- the California Corridor (Bay Area–Los Angeles–San Diego);
- the Empire Corridor (NYC to Buffalo);
- the Pacific Northwest Corridor (Vancouver, B.C. to Eugene, OR);
- the South Central Corridor(San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Little Rock, Oklahoma City, Tulsa);
- the Gulf Coast Corridor (Houston, New Orleans, Mobile, Meridian, Birmingham);
- the Chicago Hub Network (Chicago, Twin Cities, St. Louis, Kansas City, Detroit, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis);
- the Florida Corridor (Orlando, Tampa, Miami);
- the Keystone Corridor (Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh);
- the Northern New England Corridor (Portland, Boston, Montreal);
- the Southeast Corridor (Washington, Richmond, Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, Columbia, Macon, Savannah, Birmingham, Jacksonville).



The Obama Administration

The Obama Administration has expressed its support for passenger and high speed rail in the months since the inauguration. Passenger rail finally has a friend in the White House. On the eve of the inauguration, President Obama, Vice President Biden and their families rode a passenger train, run by BLET members, from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. The administration has declared high speed rail as one of its priorities.

On April 16, 2009, President Obama, Vice President Biden and Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, held a press conference to announce the administration's proposal for high speed rail development in the United States. During the press conference, all three touted the benefits of high speed rail to our nation's economic future, and noted that the $8 billion contained in the stimulus package was just a "down payment" on a high speed rail system for the U.S.

The President's proposal identified several pieces of legislation as good first steps towards the development of high speed rail, including:

- The FY 2008 Appropriation Act, which established a new IPR State Grant Program.
- The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (RSIA).
- The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA).
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

The Administration identified a near-term investment strategy which seeks to:

- Advance new express high-speed corridor services (operating speeds above 150 mph on primarily dedicated track) in select corridors of 200–600 miles.
- Develop emerging and regional high-speed corridor services (operating speeds up to 90–110 mph and 110–150 mph respectively, on shared and dedicated track) in corridors of 100–500 miles.
- Upgrade reliability and service on conventional intercity rail services (operating speeds up to 79–90 mph).

The administration proposed three funding tracks:

- *Projects*. Provide grants to complete individual projects that are "ready to go" with preliminary engineering and environmental work completed.
- *Corridor programs*. Enter into cooperative agreements to develop entire phases or geographic sections of corridor programs that have completed corridor plans and environmental documentation, and have a prioritized list of projects to meet the corridor objectives; this approach would involve additional Federal oversight and support.
- *Planning.* Enter into cooperative agreements for planning activities using non-ARRA appropriations funds, in order to create the corridor program and project pipeline needed to fully develop a high-speed rail network.

The April 16 press conference was just one example of the Administration's public support for high speed rail. In announcing that Amtrak will receive $1.3 billion in grant funding from the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to expand passenger rail capacity, Vice President Biden reiterated the administration's commitment to passenger rail. ARRA funding roughly doubles the size of Amtrak's capital investment program over a two-year period. It will be used to upgrade railroad assets and infrastructure and for capital projects that expand passenger rail capacity.

"Over 28 million passengers ride Amtrak each year. That's about 500,000 passengers a week – or 80,000 a day," said Vice President Biden. "For too long, we haven't made the investments we needed to make Amtrak as safe, as reliable, as secure as it can be. That ends now. The funds in the Recovery Act for Amtrak will help create jobs and at the same time, repair and update critical needs of our nation's infrastructure."

"This is the Obama Administration keeping its promise to America," said Secretary LaHood. "We are investing in jobs that will allow Amtrak to add and modernize cars and engines and upgrade its tracks. We are getting transportation money to Americans quickly in order to get the American economy going again."

The U.S. Congress has noted the administration's priority and responded with record funding for high speed and passenger rail recently. High speed and passenger rail received $8 billion from the stimulus bill and an additional $5 billion in the fiscal year 2009 omnibus budget. The President noted that this funding was just the beginning.

BLET Position on High Speed Rail

The BLET believes the implementation of a nationwide high speed rail plan could greatly benefit both our membership and the country as a whole with a few adjustments to the current strategies.

Definition Change

The current definition of high speed rail relates to 110 mph and above passenger train operations. In the nearly forty years since the establishment of this definition, only one rail corridor (Acela-Northeast Corridor) has been built to that standard.

The BLET wants to change this definition so that high speed rail can include intermodal freight operations. The BLET believes that if we could include intermodal freight within the definition of high speed rail, we could build a system that would operate at speeds between 70 and 125 mph. This system could raise the average intermodal speed, allow more frequent passenger train operations and gain the support of the freight railroads as it would benefit their operations. A high speed rail system which has restricted access grade crossing separation (which is how all interstate highways and the Northeast Corridor are defined) would allow the railroads to greatly increase the average inter-modal speed from

17 mph, thereby allowing more opportunities per car to be loaded during the course of a year.

By increasing the speed of just one inter-modal train (which can be loaded approximately 10-12 times per year), the number of loadings per year could be increased. Each mile per hour improvement in speed translates into $100 million in efficiency gains including energy savings, according to General Electric. Raising volume and revenue along with better equipment utilization gives the railroad increased revenue. With the support of freight railroads and their permission to use current rights of way, the eminent domain concerns could be removed, thus decreasing the costs of the overall system.

Any system that operates in excess of 150 mph will not be commingled with inter-modal freight operations, and may not be supported by the freight railroads. Thus, we propose to change the definition of high speed rail to gain their support.

The freight railroads have often placed passenger trains running on freight lines at a competitive disadvantage, even though there are legal safeguards in place to prevent this. The BLET believes that the use of temporal separation would allow freight/passenger rail to operate on the same lines as an intermodal system and it would take away the questions about which would take precedence on a particular line. Temporal separation would provide a buffer so that freight can not operate on the line at the same time as passenger rail, without decreasing the safety of either or the ability to thrive in a competitive market.

Standardization of Infrastructure

We also believe that any new system must be standardized so that a seamless network is created from coast to coast which can be integrated with the existing Amtrak and freight railroad infrastructure. During the inception of our nation's railroad infrastructure, the need for standardization was seen as imperative and we must continue to operate a seamless railroad system.

Engineer Must Remain On Board Locomotive

The BLET believes that there must remain a locomotive engineer in the cab of any high speed locomotive. While technology and automation have their place, it is not in the cab of a locomotive. The federally certified locomotive engineers and trainmen currently working on our nation's railroads are highly skilled and well trained, and they must remain on the job, ensuring our nation's citizens are kept safe.

Employees Must Be Given All Rights and Benefits Conferred to Railroad Workers

The BLET also wants to ensure the jobs created the creation of a high speed rail system are safeguarded for railroad workers, and ensures that all workers in the project are covered by federal laws relating to railroad workers, including the Railway Labor Act,

Railroad Retirement Act and the Federal Employers Liability Act. All workers on a high speed railroad system must be considered to be railroad workers and be entitled to all of the rights and privileges conferred by that distinction. We have, unfortunately, seen these rights taken away during the creation of new passenger/commuter rail systems built in recent years – even those built on existing rights of way – and would like for it to be mandated that all workers on these systems be railroad workers.

Summary

Development of a high speed rail infrastructure will take time, money and patience. With the changes that we have proposed, the nation stands to gain from the implementation of high speed rail. It could increase our rail capacity and inter-modal speeds; eliminate of congestion in our nation's ports, highways and airports; provide a viable alternative to mass transportation issues throughout the country; lessen our dependence on foreign oil; reduce our environmental footprint; and create an estimated 47,000 permanent, good paying jobs for every $1 billion we spend developing and maintaining the high speed rail system.

The bottom line is that high speed rail is the solution to resolving most of our major passenger/freight railroad challenges in this nation.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Tolman, Vice President & National Legislative Representative

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