



NEWS RELEASE

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Major New Study ID's Best U.S. High-Speed Rail Corridors

Most Promising: Populous Regions with Large Job Centers and Transit

Recommends Federal Investment in Corridors with the Greatest Ridership Potential

(New York, NY) – A new study released today by America 2050 identifies the high-speed rail corridors with the greatest potential to attract ridership in each of the nation's "megaregions" – networks of metropolitan regions that collectively contain more than 70 percent of U.S. population and jobs. Corridors connecting populous regions with large job centers, rail transit networks, and existing air markets scored best. The study also recommends that the federal government adopt a quantitative approach to evaluating future investment in high-speed rail.

The 56-page study, entitled, "High-Speed Rail in America," cites ridership potential as the number one factor in determining if a corridor is suitable for investment, identifies the specific conditions that generate ridership demand, and scores each corridor according to strength in those areas. The top performing corridors in each region determined to have the greatest potential demand for high-speed rail ridership include corridors, such as: New York-Washington, DC; Chicago-Milwaukee; Los Angeles-San Diego; Tampa (via Orlando) to Miami; Dallas-Houston; Atlanta-Birmingham; Portland-Seattle; and Denver-Pueblo.

- more, more, more -

Scoring was based on factors that have contributed to rail ridership in other systems around the world: regional and city population size and density, employment concentrations, rail transit accessibility, air travel markets, and the composition of job markets by sector.

Based on the analysis, the report proposes that the federal government adopt a similar approach to evaluating where to invest future dollars and calls for prioritizing investments where the potential for ridership demand is greatest. It also calls for a new nationwide study of long distance travel in America, the majority of which takes place by auto. The last nationwide study of this kind – the American Travel Survey – was completed in 1995 and is outdated.

“America 2050 strongly believes that investments in HSR will be essential to the long-term economic success and mobility of the nation and its megaregions, and supports the Obama Administration’s efforts to lay the foundation for a national HSR network serving these places,” said Robert Yaro, president of Regional Plan Association and co-chair of America 2050. “The report recommends, however, that the federal government adopt a data-driven, ridership-based approach to choosing rail corridors for federal investment in the future in order to direct funding toward projects with the greatest market demand.”

The next two years are crucial in building public confidence in this long term program as it faces the challenge of an incoming Congress intent on cutting national spending. Congress is expected to vote annually to appropriate funds for the high-speed rail program.

The report acknowledges that while ridership is an important factor to screen for investment, it is not the only consideration. The federal government must weigh multiple factors, such as project readiness, ability to acquire rights of way, and local political support for rail projects – as the rejection of rail monies by incoming governors in Ohio and Wisconsin recently showed. The Obama Administration was also constrained in the first year of this program by a weak pool of projects to choose from – a symptom of states generally not engaging in rail planning efforts prior to 2009 due to lack of federal support.

The report only examined corridors of up to 600 miles in length – the range of miles at which high-speed rail can compete effectively with automobiles and airplanes – and collected data for every metropolitan region along each corridor. The scoring methodology was designed so that corridors with large central business districts, regional populations, existing transit systems, and regional air markets scored highest in the study. Short corridors that concentrate multiple major cities and employment centers tended to score highly in the study.

The report is a follow-up study to America 2050's 2009 report, "Where High-Speed Rail Works Best," which analyzed 27,000 potential corridors or "city pairs" and ranked them according to a weighted average of the six survey criteria, but did not consider the alignment of the corridors or the cities in between each pairing. "High-Speed Rail in America" refines this analysis by accounting for the network benefits of having multiple stations along a corridor.

For example, a key advantage of rail over air is that it can make intermediate stops and pick up additional passengers without expending the time or fuel that would be required of airplanes to make stops. The report also builds on its predecessor by providing a more fine-grained analysis of population size and the number of jobs in proximity to potential high-speed rail stations by drawing 2-mile, 10-mile, and 25-mile rings around the central station in each region and counting the number of jobs and people living in those areas.

"Now that the initial rush of high-speed rail stimulus grants have been awarded to regions such as California, Florida, and the Midwest, it's time to build the foundation for a program that will have long-term sustainability and gain public support. Collecting data on long-distance travel and identifying the most promising markets for high-speed rail is essential to ensuring our money is well spent," said Petra Todorovich, Director, America 2050. "So is educating the public and decision makers about where high-speed rail works best – in corridors that connect dense city centers, transit networks, and large populations, and in corridors with existing regional air markets."

"To maximize the benefits of high-speed rail, systems must connect to dense city centers and to existing public transit systems," said Armando Carbonell, chairman of the Department of Planning and Urban Form at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, www.lincolnst.edu, and co-chair of America 2050. "This report sheds light on the most appropriate corridors for investment in each megaregion across the nation."

The report was made possible through the generous support of The Rockefeller Foundation. The complete report can be found online at www.America2050.org.

ABOUT AMERICA 2050 *America 2050 is a national urban planning initiative to develop an infrastructure plan and growth strategy for America. This plan includes investments in sustainable transportation, the energy grid, and water infrastructure to shape quality communities, create jobs, and make America more competitive and livable in the 21st century. For more information go to www.America2050.org.*