

The terrorist attacks on September 11th dramatically changed the way we look at transportation in America. A balanced transportation system is not just some Portland planner's dream; it is essential for our national security and economy. With major cutbacks in airline service and lengthy new check-in requirements, travelers have increasingly looked to Amtrak to provide a reliable, safe, and competitive travel alternative. In many transportation corridors where rush hour transforms regional highways into parking lots, ambitious new high-speed rail routes connecting the downtown business centers of our major cities are being developed. We need to accelerate these plans and develop a truly viable passenger rail network.

America once boasted the world's finest rail passenger system, with a multitude of trains connecting virtually every city in the nation. However, as the federal subsidies for our national highway system and airports have increased dramatically, our focus shifted away from rail and resulted in the massive decline in our rail system.

It is time to resolve the conflict that has shaped - and undermined - Amtrak from its very beginning. Amtrak was created in 1971 as a federal response to the threatened elimination of national rail passenger service resulting from the bankruptcy of several major rail carriers. Since then, Congress has virtually eliminated Amtrak's ability to alter unprofitable routes, close stations, or relocate its work force. Moreover, as owner of most of the Northeast Corridor rail lines, Amtrak is required to invest hundreds of millions of dollars annually simply to maintain and preserve the rail line for intercity, commuter, and freight rail operations. Now Congress has required Amtrak to be self-sufficient by 2002, something no other mode of transportation has been asked to achieve.

Approximately \$1.5 billion annually is required to modernize Amtrak to provide the level and quality of service that Americans expect and deserve. For perspective, over the last thirty years, the federal government has put nearly 70 times more money into highways and aviation than into the intercity passenger rail system. In the past year alone, the federal government invested more than \$33 billion in highways and \$12 billion in aviation. Unlike the airlines, Amtrak owns and maintains many of its stations and must pay the entire cost for its traffic control, dispatching systems, and security. Congress recently passed legislation to provide significant financial assistance to the airline industry. It is only fair that we give similar federal capital assistance to ensure the viability and success of the nation's intercity passenger rail system.

Amtrak has demonstrated that rail passenger service can and should play an important role in a balanced national transportation system. Rail can be used to reduce congestion on our roads and skies. If we diverted \$2 billion of the airport money annually to rail service, we would free up more than enough airport capacity to cover the diversion. In Chicago, for example, where a major political battle is underway over building a third airport, fully 40% of flights are of distances less than 300 miles. In San Francisco, these same short-distance flights account for half of all flights. Here in the Pacific Northwest, the quickest and most effective way to add capacity to SeaTac and the Portland Airport and reduce congestion on I-5 would be to create a high-speed rail connection between Portland and Seattle. With trains reaching potential speeds of 150 mph, it would be much faster to use rail for these short distances. Security delays and flight reduction make Amtrak more competitive than ever before, especially for short distance trips.

Amtrak was there when the nation depended on it. It is now time to act to ensure that this system is here when the next emergency arrives. It's time to be putting more of our money into this environmentally superior, energy-efficient transportation alternative already relied upon by hundreds of millions of travelers around the world. I'm confident that the public will insist Congress step up to the plate not just to confirm once and for all Amtrak's mission, but to create long-term, reliable federal funding to make that vision a reality. America's future depends on it.

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