

President Proposes \$45 Billion for Visionary Rail Plan

By Dave Goldin

President Obama has announced a dramatic new reauthorization plan for Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) programs as part of his recently released 2014 budget proposal. The Administration clearly put major effort into the structure of the program, which offers a comprehensive and integrated strategy for a modern national freight and passenger rail system.

The centerpiece of the request is \$40 billion over five years for a major new initiative, the National High Performance Rail System (NHPRS). This program addresses

virtually every component of infrastructure, every type of system operator, and every market served by these systems.

The NHPRS has three components:

1. Current Passenger Rail Service (CPRS) program, which essentially replaces the existing Amtrak rail grant funding structure;

2. Rail Service Improvement Program (RSIP), dedicated to developing new key passenger rail corridors, expanding and improving existing corridors;

continued on page 7



Zippering from Rochester to the Twin Cities

By Pete Goldin

Minnesota DOT (MnDOT), in a partnership with the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority, is moving forward with the high-speed facet of its state rail plan, exhibiting a solid commitment to true high-speed rail at speeds of 150 mph and higher.

The first steps are being taken on Minnesota's Zip Rail corridor, a proposed high-speed rail line between Rochester and the Twin Cities offering 45-minute service between the two regional centers.

Engineering firm Parsons Brinckerhoff has been engaged since November 2012 to conduct both a feasibility study and a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Mayo Clinic, based in Rochester and the state's largest private employer, is the economic driver behind the rail plan. With over 3 million patients and visitors each year, with many arriving via the Twin Cities, the project will provide a reliable

continued on page 5

High Speed Rail Tour of China

September 2013

It is hard to get your head around China's high-speed rail program. You have to see it in person to understand the true scope of the network.

China has opened over 4,000 miles of new high-speed line since 2008 and continues to invest heavily in railroad development. Beijing and Shanghai (the distance from Chicago to New York) are now linked by 72 trains a day, the fastest making the trip in less than 5 hours. The new stations themselves are awe-inspiring.

The Beijing - Wuhan segment opened last year, cutting express travel times on the the 1,400-mile Shenzhen-Beijing route – roughly the distance from New York to New Orleans – to about 8 hours.

This trip will be two weeks long in order to allow a good mix of facility tours and sightseeing. We will see a wide variety of transport facilities, including subways, light rail, bus rapid transit and factories. And, of course, we will ride the Shanghai maglev.

Please call the Society of International Railway Travelers at 800-478-4881 for more information.

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Richard Harnish

Making History in 2013



While 110-mph trains have begun to roll in the Midwest, there are even more exciting developments on both coasts that offer more promise for high-speed rail.

In just a few months, history will be made when ground is broken in California's San Joaquin Valley on the first 28-mile segment of the nation's first true high-speed rail system. From Madera to Fresno, construction crews will begin building entirely new infrastructure that will ultimately extend 520 miles to the north and south, linking San Francisco and Sacramento to Los Angeles and San Diego with 220-mph trains.

Nothing comparable has been built in the Western Hemisphere. It will be a state-of-the-art, completely grade-separated, high-performance rail corridor, sealed from all surface traffic.

Of course, it's going to take some time and some money. The Madera – Fresno segment is one of five construction contracts that together will constitute a new 130-mile trunk line extending from Merced to Bakersfield. The trunk line is expected to cost \$6 billion and take five years to build. It is the core of the entire 520-mile system.

But even before electric bullet trains are cruising non-stop from the Bay Area to Tinseltown, the trunk line will be joined with existing track to provide new services not available today. For instance, new high-performance trains could travel at 125-mph or above from Bakersfield on the trunk line and then use upgraded tracks at conventional speeds to reach Sacramento and the Bay Area.

This integrated approach, dubbed "blended service" by the California High Speed Rail Authority, will allow near-term service improvements while other system sections are being built and provide a platform for continued improvement upgrades to high-speed rail in the future. It is a long-term strategy that will leverage the investment in infrastructure each step of the way.

Which brings us over to the other coast. The Obama Administration has just unveiled a bold, new vision as part of its 2014 budget request – the National High Performance Rail System (see our cover story). The President has put forward progressive passenger rail plans in past budgets, but this new proposal encompasses a more integrated, long-term strategy addressing all components and markets of the entire system.

If the President's transportation budget proposal were to pass in its current form, it would also mark an historic turning point where the U.S. began to implement a more balanced approach to transportation planning and funding.

The highlights of the proposal are \$13 billion over five years for maintaining Amtrak operations and getting the existing Amtrak infrastructure up to a state of good repair and \$26 billion to build new passenger rail routes – most of which would likely be Core Express corridors with speeds above 125 mph.

The Administration also is requesting an overhaul of the current rail funding structure. Amtrak is currently funded outside of the transportation appropriations process through the General Fund. It recommends renaming the Highway Trust Fund as the Transportation Trust Fund and creating a new Rail Account within that fund for Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) programs – paid for through "mandatory resources" authorized by Congress.

We applaud President Obama and FRA Administrator Joe Szabo for their effort to bring U.S. passenger rail into the twenty-first century. They have done their part, now we have to do our part. Please work with me to get Congress to pass the President's FRA budget request. We will make history.

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Amtrak Starts Maintenance on Newly Purchased Michigan Track

By Pete Goldin

Michigan DOT (MDOT) finalized the purchase of a 135-mile segment of the Chicago–Detroit route between Kalamazoo and Dearborn from Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) in December 2012, and Amtrak has already started maintenance on the segment.

MDOT worked with NS to transition maintenance of the line to Amtrak on February 16, 2013, and Amtrak is currently conducting maintenance to bring the route into a state of good repair for service at traditional speeds.

“We are stabilizing the track now,” said Marc Magliari, Media Relations Manager, Amtrak Government Affairs & Corporate Communications. “We have a lot of work to do. There has been track and tie deterioration, and we are doing some signal system work as well.”

How long the current maintenance

will take has not yet been determined.

“We are currently working out the final project schedule with Amtrak,” said Timothy Hoeffner, Administrator, MDOT Office of Rail. “We anticipate completing the project over 3 construction seasons.”

The line is directly connected to the Amtrak-owned Michigan District, which runs 97 miles from Kalamazoo to Porter, Indiana. That means nearly 80 percent of the route between Detroit and Chicago is publicly owned, which supports the state’s ability to maintain the corridor for passenger trains at higher speeds.

The intention of the purchase was to upgrade the track to support 110-mph service along the corridor between Chicago and Detroit. The plan is to reduce travel time between Detroit and Chicago to about five hours. Before that can happen however, MDOT and

Amtrak must deploy Incremental Train Control System (ICTS), a new Positive Train Control (PTC) system developed by General Electric.

Hoeffner said no dates have been set yet for PTC deployment or 110-mph operation on the new segment. MDOT and Amtrak are finalizing schedules with FRA to begin upgrades to the track along the route used by Amtrak Wolverine Service and Blue Water trains from Kalamazoo to Central and Eastern Michigan.

“We are working with Amtrak to complete the PTC deployment schedule,” he explained. “Once the PTC system is installed we anticipate deploying it incrementally on the corridor in segments as the track improvements are completed.”

“The next area for expanding 110-mph service will be between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo,” Magliari added.

Golden State Update

Caltrain Modernization Program

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) Board of Directors approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) to enhance the rail corridor between San Francisco and San Jose.

The enhancements include track improvements, added safety features and preparing the Caltrain route – from San Francisco to San Jose with added service to Gilroy – to accommodate future high-speed rail service.

The MOU helps implement the \$1.45 billion Caltrain Modernization Program, which includes upgrades to existing Caltrain rail lines, electrification of the Caltrain corridor, installation of advanced signal systems and purchasing new electrified rail vehicles. The state’s \$705 million contribution is being matched thorough a combination of federal, regional and local funding sources. Caltrain is preparing to electrify the corridor by 2019.

GAO Report on CHSRA

In a recent study, GAO found that CHSRA met some but not all of the best practices in GAO’s Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide (Cost Guide) for producing cost estimates that are accurate, comprehensive, well documented, and credible. GAO warns that not following all best practices increases risk of cost overruns, missed deadlines, and unmet performance targets.

For example, GAO found the CHSRA’s ridership and revenue forecasts to be reasonable; however, additional updates are necessary to refine the ridership and revenue model for the 2014 business plan.

In addition, GAO found the CHSRA faces funding uncertainty and uncovered limitations in the benefit-cost analysis of the project.

GAO recommends that to produce reliable cost estimates, FRA should improve its guidance so it is in line with the best practices in GAO’s Cost Guide. The Department of Transportation did not agree or dis-

agree with the recommendation but said, with further analysis, applying the Cost Guide would be feasible. The CHSRA also said it will incorporate many of the report’s findings into future cost and ridership estimates.

CHSRA Settles Lawsuits

CHSRA has settled three legal challenges over its May 2012 approval of the Merced-Fresno stretch of the route. All three lawsuits alleged that the rail authority violated provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

In January, the city of Chowchilla dropped its suit due to a settlement. In February, CHSRA settled with Timeless Investment, Millennium Acquisitions, Horizon Enterprises and Everspring Alliance. The last remaining case – led by the Madera and Merced county farm bureau organizations, the Madera County Board of Supervisors, the Chowchilla Water District and Preserve Our Heritage, a farm advocacy group – was settled in late April.

The final settlement provides for the preservation of important farmland and mitigation of effects of high-speed rail construction on agricultural operations.

With these cases settled, the rail authority expects to begin construction this summer in the Madera-Fresno area, the first stretch of the statewide rail system.

Perez-Estolano Joins CHSRA Board

California Governor Jerry Brown appointed US High Speed Rail Association (USHSR) Advisory Board Member Katherine Perez-Estolano to the CHSRA Board. Perez-Estolano was a former professor at the USC School of Policy, Planning and Development, and has an extensive background in transportation, land use issues, urbanism, and real estate development.

Perez-Estolano is co-founder of Estolano LeSar Perez (ELP) Advisors LLC, a firm that works with cities, agencies, stakeholders, foundations and business groups to craft strategies and environmentally-friendly solutions to create thriving, healthy, vibrant communities that feature strong economic development and transportation policies.

HS2 Construction to Begin in 2017

By Paul Derby

Midwest Rail Report UK Correspondent

It has been described as the most significant infrastructure project in the UK since the rapid expansion of the country's motorway network in the 1950s and '60s. High Speed 2 (HS2) promises to reduce journey times drastically between London and major cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, with construction due to begin in 2017.

While many parts of mainland Europe have been investing in high-speed rail for decades, the UK has lagged behind in terms of its modernization agenda, with the country's only existing high-speed line (HS1) connecting London's St Pancras International Station with Kent and the Channel Tunnel.

In 2009, the then Labour Government began examining the case for a new high-speed network, and following public consultation in 2011, Phase One of the project linking the capital to Birmingham was given the green light in January last year. As a result the UK is gearing up for the controversial scheme, which will cost more than £30 billion and is one of the hottest political issues of recent years.

Under the current construction timetable the 140-mile London-Birmingham route will open to passengers in 2026, cutting journey times from 84 minutes to less than 50 minutes. In January, UK Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin announced the preferred routes for Phase Two of HS2, which is scheduled to begin carrying passengers by 2033. It will consist of two branches – the western branch connecting Birmingham to Manchester, while the eastern line involves the creation of a new East Midlands hub at Toton and services to stations in Sheffield and Leeds.

The Case for and Against

The UK Government has met fierce opposition to the HS2 plans, not only from campaign groups but also from prominent figures within its own ranks. Opponents of HS2 say that the Government's business

case is based on unrealistic assumptions, that the environmental impact has not been properly assessed and that the UK simply does not have the money to pay for the project as the country's economy continues to struggle to generate any meaningful growth and faces a huge fiscal deficit to repay.

The Government, however, is standing squarely behind the case for HS2, stating that it will "spread wealth and prosperity" around the country. Plans for HS2 have

times – Manchester to London will be achievable in 68 minutes, roughly half the existing travel time – ministers cite capacity as another key issue. Over the last decade the number of UK passenger journeys by rail has grown by 50% to 1.46 billion a year and research suggests that by 2020 an additional 400 million annual journeys will need to be accommodated.

Network Rail, which is responsible for managing Britain's track infrastructure, also forecasts that the West Coast Main

Line, Europe's busiest mixed-use railway, will reach saturation by the mid 2020s. That issue, combined with the limited capacity for freight on the existing network, is an example of why HS2 is a 'must' according to its supporters.

An improved passenger experience is also high on the agenda, with promises of 'intelligent ticketing', vibrant stations and information linking to other modes of transport.

One of the most contentious issues surrounding HS2 centers on economic benefits and jobs. Government estimates state that the project will deliver 100,000 jobs through construction of the new line, maintenance and new station hubs and that HS2 will return more than £2 for every £1 spent. Experts on both sides of the argument continue to produce reports that come to contradictory conclusions on the value of HS2 to the nation



been broadly welcomed by the UK's business community.

The latest round in the battle over HS2 came at London's High Court in March when Mr Justice Ouseley ruled that the Government's compensation consultation process was "so unfair as to be unlawful". Parts of the consultation will now need to be repeated. Mr Justice Ouseley did, however, find in favour of the Government on nine of the 10 points being considered and ministers insist that the court ruling will not affect the project's timetable.

As well as measures such as journey

as a whole.

What's Next?

Although the HS2 project is moving forward, the UK Government still faces some difficult hurdles. A decision on the proposed spur linking the HS2 line to Heathrow, the UK's busiest airport, has been deferred until after a review into future UK airport capacity due to report in 2015.

Meanwhile, an extensive period of consultation will begin soon on the preferred routes for HS2 Phase Two. The final route will be chosen by the end of 2014.

and safe transportation solution that will meet forecasted population and economic growth demands between Rochester and the Twin Cities.

“In our State Rail Plan, we recognized that Rochester is an important regional center and needs to be connected to the Twin Cities metro area,” explained Dan Krom, Director of the MnDOT Passenger Rail Office. “We identified state resources and local funding to kick off this feasibility study work, and we are looking at connecting Rochester with a new greenfield alignment capable of true high-speed service.”

Even though MnDOT conducted high-speed rail studies in 1991 and 1996, it is starting from scratch with the new studies.

Although the media have reported that the study’s focus is a line from Rochester to MSP Airport, Krom said the termini have not been decided yet.

“Getting in and out of the Twin Cities is going to be a challenge,” Krom said, outlining three possible termini for the line from Rochester: St. Paul Union Depot, Minneapolis Transportation Interchange, and Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP).

“Ideally the study sponsors would like to get to MSP Airport, but we are going to look at what makes the most sense from an incremental implementation standpoint,” he explained. “The airport would be the logical terminus, but there are some serious challenges getting across a protected waterway to get into the airport, and access in and out of the airport would be costly.”

“It may be a later phase,” Krom added. “We have fairly good access into St. Paul Union Depot through Dakota County, using an existing rail corridor.”

On the Rochester side, MnDOT will be looking at a downtown station and a possible connection to the Rochester International Airport (RST) as well.

The feasibility study and Tier 1 EIS are expected to be completed by mid-summer 2014.

Building the Foundation

In late March, Zip Rail representatives met with US Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and FRA Administrator Joseph Szabo in Washington.

“It was a very productive meeting,” Krom confirmed. “They talked about the project, administration support for passenger rail across the country, and the opportunity

for a true public-private partnership in the development of the project.

“We are working hand-in-hand with the Federal Rail Administration (FRA),” he continued. “Even though they don’t have a federal dime in this project at this time, the FRA is engaged in the project. They are spending staff resources, reviewing our documents, making sure everything we are doing is federally compliant at this early stage. By the time we seek federal money, we won’t have to go back and revisit processes to be a federal partner.”

The lack of federal funds is not slowing the project at this early stage. MnDOT is funding the feasibility study and early environmental work with \$2.3 million in state and local funds.

The next round of funding is in question, however. Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton, a Democrat, publicly acknowledged in February that the state has no more funds to pursue high-speed rail projects.

“We have funding to continue our planning work, but there are other priorities in the state,” Krom said. “But there is a lot of interest in the state legislature, and Governor Dayton is extremely supportive of our work in the Rochester area. It is just a matter of weighing the priorities.”

“We have the money to continue on the project development path, but at some point we are going to need the money to construct,” he said. “That will probably be five or ten years out. There is not money at the federal level to do that right now. But if we keep moving forward, then when money becomes available we are ready to go.” The project anticipates considerable private sector participation, reducing the level of federal funding required for con-

struction.

MnDOT’s ambitious plans will require state, federal and private sector funds when it comes time to construct the line. The state is proceeding with a passenger rail project from the Twin Cities to Duluth, and after Rochester it will be considering lines to St. Cloud and Mankato, and then it is a matter of connecting all those points to form a network, Krom said.

“This is a long-term effort,” said Krom. “This is not something that we are going to get done in the next 20 years. The federal government has pulled back, Congress has pulled back from continued funding for investments that were made during ARRA, but we are going to try to get the base service out there when money is available. Our State Rail Plan calls for additional services beyond 2030, but we have to focus on what we have resources for now and build that core system.”

Local Heroes

The contracts for the preliminary Zip Rail studies actually were commissioned by the Olmsted County Regional Railroad Authority – a county commission charged with freight and passenger rail development – rather than MnDOT.

Krom explained that MnDOT conducted a study in 2011 to find out how other states fund and govern passenger rail programs, and decided to follow a best practice to rely on local rail authorities.

“Our approach is to mobilize these local authorities to build momentum, develop stakeholder groups, show the local investment and desire to move forward,” said Krom. “Once the project gets further into the

continued on page 7

Rail between the Twin Cities

In addition to Zip Rail, Minnesota is working on expanding conventional rail service and transit.

On December 8, St. Paul Union Depot was officially opened, although it currently only serves bus transit. Amtrak trains do not serve the station yet, but Dan Krom of MnDOT reports that there has been an agreement between Amtrak and FRA on the required signal and switching improvements. That work will be conducted this summer and Amtrak is expected to be running trains into St. Paul Union Depot by late summer or early fall 2013.

In addition, the Central Corridor Light Rail Line, which will connect downtown Minneapolis with

downtown St. Paul, is expected to be operational in early 2014.

“The station located out in front of St. Paul Union Depot is completed, the tracks are in, and about 90% of all the construction is done,” says Krom. “Now it is a matter of electrifying the tracks, and testing the equipment, which will take place over the next year.

“The level of development in the area around St. Paul Union Depot is phenomenal right now,” Krom says. “People have been snapping up property in that area because of the fast connection they will have to Minneapolis. It really has been a huge driver for economic development.”

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FRA continued from page 1

3. Research, Development, and Technology program.

The budget requests \$2.7 billion for CPRS in 2014, roughly double what Amtrak received in 2012. It is focused on getting the NEC trackage up to a state of good repair, replacing aging equipment, tackling a backlog of repair needs, and bringing stations into ADA compliance. It also offers freight railroads a huge incentive – the implementation of Positive Train Control, which will be required on all Amtrak routes by 2015.

The largest component of the NHPRS is the Rail Service Improvement Program. At \$3.7 billion, it constitutes 55 percent of the President’s total 2014 FRA budget. It would fund new or substantially improved passenger rail routes, including infrastructure, stations, equipment for service upgrades. It would also pay for

Positive Train Control on commuter railroads.

The FRA estimates \$10 billion worth of corridor projects could be ready to compete for the requested funds by next year. The agency projects that most of those grants would advance Core Express (125-mph+)

corridors.

Two other important parts of RSIP are the Congestion Mitigation and Freight Capacity programs. These programs target improving the freight network by adding capacity and removing bottlenecks, upgrading shared-use infrastructure in terminal areas, safety enhancements and rail line relocation, and even short-line capital upgrades.

But wait, there’s more. Remarkably, the Administration’s budget proposes an additional injection of \$50 billion in FY 2014 for Immediate Transportation Investments in highway, aviation, and rail to jump start the investment in infrastructure. Of this amount, \$5 billion is proposed for FRA programs – \$3 billion for RSIP and \$2 billion for CPRS. This brings the total FY 2014 FRA request to \$11.6 billion.

		FY 2014 (\$ Millions)	5-Year (\$ Millions)	
Traditional FRA accounts	FRA Safety & Operations	185	n/a	General Fund
	Research & Development	35	183	
Current services (including Amtrak) organized by "business lines"	Current Passenger Rail Service	2,700	13,200	Transportation Trust Fund New Rail Account
	Northeast Corridor	675	4,225	
	State Corridors	300	800	
	Long-Distance Routes	800	3,675	
National Assets	925	4,500		
Integrated passenger + freight improvement programs	Rail Service Improvement Program	3,660	26,400	
	Passenger Corridors	3,250	23,180	
	Congestion Mitigation	150	1,300	
	Freight Capacity Planning	190	1,570	
New focus on workforce and innovation	Research, Development & Technology	55	217	
	High-Performance Rail R&D	25	67	
	National Cooperative Rail Research Program	5	25	
	Workforce Development	25	125	
	Total	6,635	40,000	

ZIP RAIL continued from page 5

federal process with preliminary engineering, in summer 2014, then the state will be the lead for the project. So that is why initially Olmsted County issued the contracts for the studies.”

The Chicago Connection

“We envision a high-speed connec-

tion into Rochester that would eventually serve as the first 90-mile leg of a true high-speed corridor to Chicago, running at about 150 mph,” noted Krom. “But our focus right now is just between Rochester and the Twin Cities. Extending this line to Chicago is something Minnesota will be doing 25 years from now.”

Meanwhile, Minnesota, Wisconsin

and Amtrak are looking at the possibility of a second daily train between the Twin Cities and Chicago in the near term. The potential new service would start and end in St. Paul rather than Seattle, so the on-time performance will be tremendously improved, said Krom. Results of that study are expected by the end of the summer.



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Kazakhstan High Speed Line to Open in 2017

Systra has been awarded a contract by Kazakhstan National Railway (KTZ) to oversee design and construction of a 630-mile high-speed rail line linking Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, with Almaty, the nation's largest city and former capital.

This will be the first high-speed line in Kazakhstan and has only a four-year construction window. KTZ wants to open

the line in conjunction with the World Expo to be held in Astana in the spring of 2017.

KTZ will operate trains up to 150 mph on the line and expects a travel time of 5 hours and 30 minutes between the two cities. Six daily round-trip trains are planned. The rail operator will order 220 coaches from Tulpar-Talgo in 2013.

The rail corridor will pass through a steppe region with temperature variations of over 150°F over the course of a year. The line will also include a 6-mile viaduct over Lake Balkhash.

The contract for the project was signed by Systra CEO Pierre Verzat and KTZ Chairman Aksar Mamin on March 5 in Astana.

