

Testimony

**Honorable Jason Altmire
US Congressmen, 4th District of Pennsylvania**

**Pennsylvania House of Representatives' Transportation Committee
Hearing on High-Speed Rail and MAGLEV in Pennsylvania**

**Friday, November 6, 2009
Carnegie Mellon University**

Today's hearing will examine the prospects for High-Speed Rail in Pennsylvania's transportation future and the influence of MAGLEV in that debate as we study the necessity for expanding passenger rail service and efficiency.

As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I am acutely aware of our nation's transportation needs. America's transportation system is near capacity, with gridlock on our highways and in our airspace. In 2006, there were more than three trillion vehicle miles traveled, roughly double the nation's total mileage traveled in 1980, and more than four times the total mileage traveled in 1957 - the first year of the Interstate.

Our nation's airways fared no better. Despite record passenger loadings, delays in the nation's aviation system delivered a staggering blow to the economy. In fiscal year 2008, U.S. airlines continued to meet demand, carrying 757.4 million passengers, but the impact of unprecedented fuel prices and a recession have caused airlines to cut back capacity by reducing and eliminating routes, leaving consumers to vie for fewer travel options.

The U. S. Department of Transportation has described the current congestion on our highways and our air infrastructure as "chronic." Moving passengers to railways can have an immediate impact on highways and airways- alleviating congestion, and reducing the consumption, consequences and our dependence on fossil fuels.

Since its origins in 1970, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation - also known as Amtrak - has been tasked with facilitating passenger services nationwide and rebuilding the rail passenger system into a modern, efficient conveyance. Today, Amtrak operates a rail network across 46 states, serving more than 500 destinations on 21,000 miles of routes with its nearly 18,000 employees. In its sixth straight year of record ridership, Amtrak served an estimated 78,000 passengers per day on its 300 trains, totaling more than 28.7 million passengers nationwide during fiscal year 2008. Given the ongoing concerns with congestion and our dependence on foreign oil, rising gas prices, and greenhouse gas emissions, both Amtrak and states continue to look for opportunities to expand passenger rail service.

Adequate investment in passenger railroad infrastructure is crucial for national economic growth, global competitiveness, the environment, and quality of life. Continued efforts to expand passenger rail services are critical to maintain an effective, nationwide system, as well as to advance Congress' and the President's vision for the development of high-speed rail in the United States.

One 75-foot wide rail corridor can carry the same number of persons per hour as a 16-lane expressway, emitting fewer pollutants and consuming less energy per passenger mile. Capacity can be added to many existing corridors at a lower cost than comparable highway improvements using modern train sets or high-speed rail.

Rail travel is six times safer than highway travel and the safest mode of transportation worldwide. Increased travel by rail stimulates economic activity and spurs private investment in urban areas and central business districts around rail stations. Rail service grants the freedom of mobility to those unable to easily use our air and highway systems because of age, physical disabilities, health problems, or economic circumstances, and reduces our dependence on foreign oil.

Investment in the expansion of passenger rail service will also encourage economic growth through the creation of highly skilled, good paying jobs. Since the recession began in December 2007, one of the hardest hit sectors has been in construction, which has seen unemployment rates more than 21 percent. Since that time, more than 1,050,000 jobs have been lost in the construction sector. Expanding passenger rail infrastructure will create jobs, not only in the construction sector of the economy, but in the manufacturing and service sectors, as well.

In order to address our nation's economic, energy, environmental, and transportation challenges, we need to continue expanding passenger rail service and invest in high-speed rail. On February 17, 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was signed into law. The Recovery Act provides \$9.3 billion dedicated to passenger rail, including \$8 billion in grants to states for development of intercity passenger and high-speed rail and \$1.3 billion for capital improvements to Amtrak. Additionally, the President's budget proposes additional funding for each of the next five years for the advancement and development of high-speed rail throughout the nation.

Pennsylvania is currently served by five key Amtrak intercity rail corridors and routes. In 2008, three of Amtrak's busiest stations were in Pennsylvania: Philadelphia 30th Street Station was ranked the third busiest station, Harrisburg was ranked 21st, and Lancaster 22nd.

Pennsylvania is a leader in high-speed rail. In order to continue that leadership, access must be expanded to western Pennsylvania and improved in eastern Pennsylvania, and this committee will have an important role in accomplishing those goals.

I know that Pittsburgh - like all major American cities - stands to benefit from increased passenger rail service. MAGLEV's work in Pittsburgh is beneficial for the state as a

whole. Examining the growth potential and eventually facilitating service in western Pennsylvania is a primary goal of mine, and I will work with the other members of the Railways Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to achieve it.

I thank the Transportation Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for holding this hearing today and look forward to a brighter future for passenger rail in Pennsylvania and America.