

BRIAN PITZER

Executive Director

All Aboard Erie

Brian Pitzer is the Executive Director of All Aboard Erie. A graduate of Kent State University, he has spent most of his career in higher education, serving at the University of Pittsburgh and as Public Relations' Director at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and Chicago State University. He and his wife Doris reside in Edinboro.

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Freight and Passenger Rail in Pennsylvania

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Point Park University

Pittsburgh, Pa

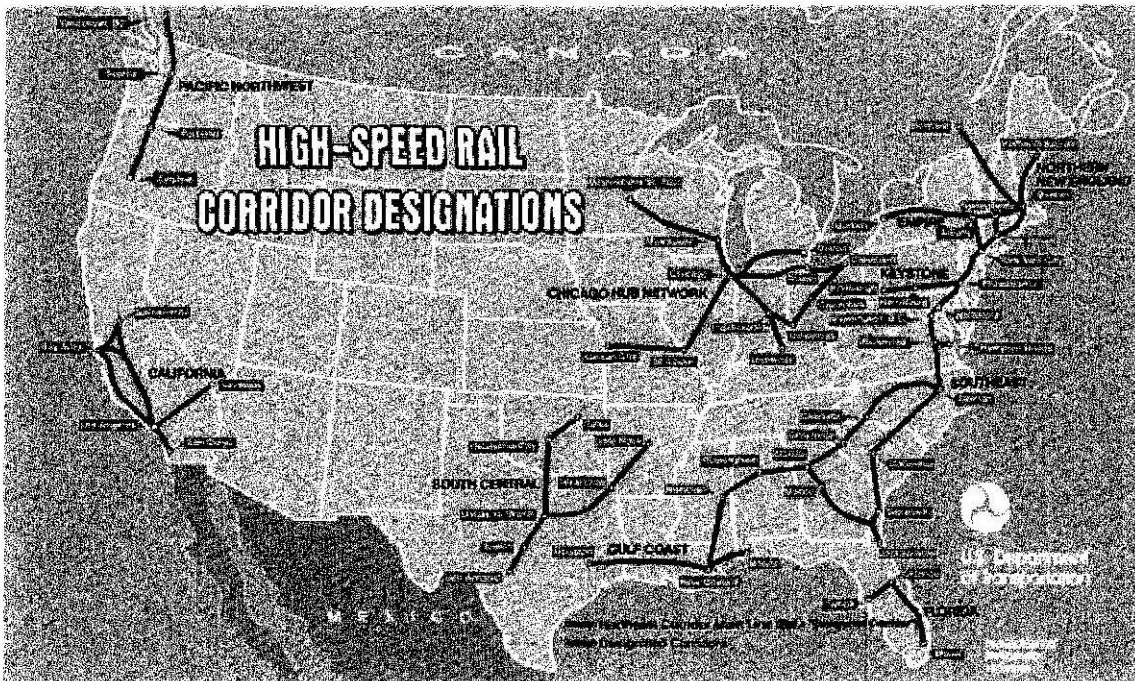
Testimony of Brian Pitzer

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Chairman Markosek, Chairman Geist, members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Brian Pitzer. I'm the executive director of All Aboard Erie and a resident of Edinboro. Please accept my heart-felt thanks for the opportunity to testify before you today on a topic that is near and dear to me. I am deeply honored to be invited to represent the people of Erie County and northwestern Pennsylvania.

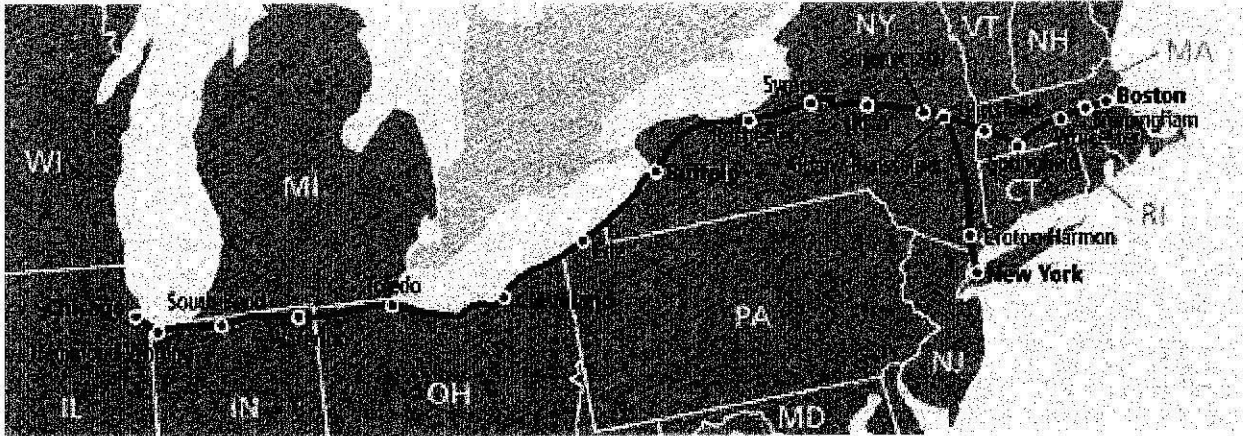
All Aboard Erie is a small but passionate organization that has been in existence for less than a year. We model ourselves after All Aboard Ohio, a rail and transit advocacy group that has been around since the 1970s. And while our organization also advocates for a variety of transportation issues, our overriding "raison d'être" is one burning issue – high-speed rail. One need only look at the map of the Federal Railroad Administration's High-Speed Rail Corridor Designations to understand our cause with crystal clarity.



You will note that the Empire Corridor in New York state extends from New England, Boston, and New York in the east as far west as Buffalo and there it ends. Likewise, as I'm sure you are well aware, the Keystone corridor connects Philadelphia to Pittsburgh but goes no farther. Similarly, the extensive Chicago Hub network ties Minneapolis/St. Paul and Kansas City in the west through Chicago eastward to Cleveland where it comes to an abrupt halt. Now, I recognize that Erie, Pennsylvania may not be the first destination for millions of Americans and yes, Canadians, but our friends in Boston, New York and Toronto will be in for a rude awakening when their high-speed rail lines are built and they will be unable to travel to the aforementioned cities in the Midwest for the lack of a less than 200-mile stretch of track along the shores of Lake Erie. The same, of course, could be said for passengers in Philadelphia, Baltimore and

Washington attempting to travel west of the Ohio River. Did our nation's rail planners somehow confuse the Gateway Center in Pittsburgh with the Gateway Arch in St. Louis?

We refer to that stretch of rail corridor between Buffalo and Cleveland as "the missing link." Because the FRA does not officially recognize that corridor they don't even have a name for it. We have taken the liberty of unofficially naming it simply – and appropriately enough – the Lake Erie Corridor. The map below presents a clearer picture of the critical link it serves in connecting the North East to the Midwest.



The Lake Erie Corridor was once a proud part of the great New York Central Railroad. It was the route taken by its premier train, the 20th Century Limited. It was also called the "water-level route" because it avoided much of the hilly terrain of the Appalachian Mountains by following the Hudson River valley north from New York to Albany and then west along the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to Toledo, and then across the flatlands of Ohio and Indiana to Chicago.

The route was level and straight – exactly the type of terrain that is most conducive to high-speed rail. And that is especially true of the 198-mile stretch from Buffalo to Cleveland. That same arrow-straight right-of-way that allowed America's streamliners to lead this nation into its industrial might of the 20th Century is still intact, patiently waiting for the full-fledged promise of high-speed rail to be fulfilled.

Now, what will that high-speed future look like? Thanks to our colleagues in Ohio, who began planning for high-speed rail in the 1970s, we have a very good sense of what high-speed rail will offer, where it will run, and what it will cost – not only in the Buckeye state, but also along the Lake Erie Corridor all the way to Niagara Falls, and along the corridor that connects Cleveland to Pittsburgh through the Mahoning and Beaver valleys. The Ohio Hub Report is a 300-page plan that was originally written in 2004 and updated in 2007. Its primary focus is what Ohioans call the "3C Corridor" connecting Cleveland to Columbus and Cincinnati. But it also devotes equal resources to corridors connecting Cleveland to Toledo and Detroit, and to Chicago, as well as the connections to Pittsburgh and Buffalo.

The link to that report is posted here:

<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Rail/Programs/passenger/Ohio%20Hub%20Plan/FullReport.pdf>

The report makes several observations, conclusions and projections, the most notable of which are the following:

“Based on criteria established by the Federal Railroad Administration, the system envisioned in the Ohio Hub Plan would generate sufficient ridership to produce revenues that would cover the overall operating costs.

“In 2025, with full implementation of the system, it is estimated that over 9.3 million riders will use a 110-mph passenger rail service. The annual operating revenue is estimated at \$311 million, while the annual operating cost is estimated at \$202 million.”

Why is high-speed rail important to northwestern Pennsylvania and the Lake Erie region?

While I am very proud of Erie and excited by the region’s potential to become one of the great transportation crossroads of America, I must also report that Erie is the poorest city in the Commonwealth. The poverty rate for the city of Erie is more than 24 percent; 14.5 percent for the county. The homeless population of the city has doubled in just the past 18 months, and the county now has the highest percentage of food stamp recipients in its history.

Unfortunately, Erie is not alone. *Forbes* magazine recently published a list of the “20 most miserable cities in America.” Nearly half of them are on or near America’s north coast. Topping the list is our neighbor to the west, Cleveland. Buffalo fares little better at number eight; Detroit ranks fourth most miserable with Chicago at number 10, Toledo at number 15, and Gary, Indiana at number 19. Also in the “bottom” 20 are Akron, Canton and Youngstown, Ohio. One could make the argument that this population corridor from Buffalo to Erie to Cleveland and beyond has the highest misery index in the entire nation.

So, what does all of this misery have to do with high-speed rail? In a word: everything. If poverty and economic decline is the disease, I believe high-speed rail is the cure. If, as John F. Kennedy said, “a rising tide lifts all ships,” then high-speed rail is like a tidal wave promising to lift this entire region into the 21st century. Simply put, the development of a comprehensive high-speed rail-system will not only create thousands of desperately needed jobs, it will be the crucible of game-changing and nation-changing economic development – just as the Interstate Highway System was 50 years ago, the transcontinental railroad before it, and the Erie Canal before it.

High-speed rail is an investment in America’s future that will pay dividends for decades to come. It has been estimated that every \$1 billion spent on high-speed rail creates about 15,000 jobs. By the way, the Ohio Hub Report estimates the cost to build the Lake Erie Corridor to be around \$800 million – which translates into roughly 12,000 jobs. And these are the kind of jobs that cannot be exported overseas.

Those job numbers are especially important to Erie because it is the home to General Electric's locomotive plant – the only locomotive factory in the United States. G.E. is the region's largest employer and when it announced the layoff of 1,500 workers a few months ago because of slow business, its impact was felt throughout the region. I can assure you that the people of Erie, and especially G.E.'s employed and unemployed workers, are keenly supportive of high-speed rail not only on the Lake Erie Corridor, but all across the nation.

In addition to job creation, high-speed rail brings myriad other benefits including reducing air pollution, curbing oil dependence, and revitalizing urban areas and center cities, not to mention simply providing another transportation option, especially for those who do not have a car or perhaps who are too old or physically unable to drive.

So, the obvious question remains: If high-speed rail is so wonderful, why isn't northwestern Pennsylvania building high-speed rail right now? The answer to that question would seem to lie at the state level.

When President Obama announced the first round of funding for high-speed rail projects in January, the big winners were California, Florida, Illinois and Wisconsin. Pennsylvania received only \$27 million – less than Maine and Vermont. While New York received \$142 million to upgrade the Empire Corridor between Albany and Buffalo, and Ohio received \$400 million to begin work on its 3C Corridor from Cincinnati to Cleveland, Pennsylvania received nothing for the Lake Erie corridor. Why? Because no one asked for any money. In fact, a year ago the Lake Erie Corridor wasn't even on the State Rail Plan map.

The states receiving the most money had the best combination of factors including need, planning and financing. The states receiving little or nothing had the least need or were the least prepared. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood scolded some states for not having their acts together.

I am happy to report that Pennsylvania appears to be getting its act together. The corridor along Lake Erie is now on the State Rail Plan for both passenger and freight. But there is much more that needs to be done. We cannot expect to receive federal funding for high-speed rail until several more steps are taken. To that end I will conclude my remarks with the following recommendations:

- Based on our conversations with PennDOT Deputy Secretary Toby Fauver, it is our understanding that the next step to bring high-speed rail to the Lake Erie Corridor must be the drafting of a Service Development Plan, followed by environmental and engineering studies. We recommend that those steps be funded and undertaken as quickly as possible.
- Second, we recommend that Pennsylvania's elected officials and transportation executives begin immediately to work with their counterparts in Ohio and New York to develop a coordinated and comprehensive plan for high-speed rail along the Lake Erie Corridor.
- Third, we recommend that Pennsylvania's state and federal elected officials work with their counterparts in Ohio and New York to draft a letter to Secretary LaHood requesting

federal high-speed rail designation for the Lake Erie corridor. A similar request has already been made for the Cleveland to Pittsburgh corridor.

- Fourth, we recommend that any rail plan or rail expenditure that is made by Pennsylvania take into consideration the G.E. locomotive plant in Erie. The state of Wisconsin has already signed a no-bid contract with a Spanish company to build its high-speed train sets. This is a shameful and unconscionable act by Wisconsin that must not be allowed to be repeated by other states, especially Pennsylvania.

I have one last request. I have in my hand a petition signed by thousands of residents of northwestern Pennsylvania and beyond, asking Secretary LaHood for high-speed rail. Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to present you and your committee with this copy of the petition as a sincere and earnest representation of the desires of these people. The original copy of the petition will be delivered to Secretary LaHood.

Mr. Chairman, once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee on behalf of All Aboard Erie and the citizens of northwestern Pennsylvania.

ADDENDUM

Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Rail - The Ohio Hub Executive Summary

Improving the capacity and efficiency of the railroad system will help ensure that the regional economy continues to be served by an effective transportation system.

Intercity transportation in the Ohio and Lake Erie region, as in many other parts of the United States, is challenged by a rapidly changing travel market, forecasts of a substantial growth in traffic, a disparity between demand and available capacity, mounting costs for construction and fuel, and limited funding available for investment. Over the last twenty years, increasing highway congestion and inefficiencies in air travel have reduced the availability and utility of the transportation system, and in many cases these changes have affected local and state economic development activity and interstate commerce. As a result, state Departments of Transportation have recognized the potential for improving the railroad system in the region's most densely populated intercity corridors.

This Ohio Hub Study is part of an ongoing effort by the State of Ohio, led by the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC), an independent commission within the Ohio Department of Transportation, and ODOT to further develop the concept of expanding transportation capacity by improving the railroad system for both passenger and freight trains. The initial Ohio Hub Study was released in 2004; this 2007 update culminates a multi-year effort to develop a feasibility-level business plan for the construction and operation of an intercity/interstate passenger rail system with connections to cities and regional rail systems in neighboring states.

The goal of the study is to determine, at a conceptual level, the financial and economic feasibility of developing a passenger rail system serving seven intercity travel corridors:

- o Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati
- o Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit
- o Cleveland-Pittsburgh
- o Cleveland-Buffalo-Niagara Falls-Toronto
- o Columbus-Pittsburgh
- o Columbus-Toledo-Detroit
- o Columbus-Lima-Ft Wayne-Chicago

System Concept and Service Goals

The passenger rail system would be integrated into the region's air, highway and local transit networks and would connect directly to international airports.

The envisioned rail system involves the construction and operation of a 1,244-mile intercity/interstate passenger rail service with 46 stations. It would serve over 22 million people in five states and southern Ontario, Canada. The seven rail corridors connect twelve major metropolitan areas and many smaller cities and towns. Stations would be located in downtown centers, in suburban areas near interstate highways, and adjacent to major international airports.

Feeder bus service to smaller communities, universities and college towns would enhance the reach of the rail system.

The Ohio Hub passenger rail service would complement both automobile and air travel by offering a modern transportation alternative with competitive travel times, reliable and frequent service and new, comfortable passenger trains. In order to offer same-day, round-trip service throughout the region, the Ohio Hub System would reduce downtown-to-downtown travel times by increasing maximum train speeds on the lines from 79-mph to 110-mph.

Network Synergies

An interconnected national passenger rail network will create economies of scale that increase regional ridership and revenue and reduce overall system operating costs.

Thirty percent of the estimated 9.3 million Ohio Hub rail trips (forecast in 2025) are connecting riders from other regional rail, air and feeder bus systems.

The Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Rail system would play an important role as part of a national network of regional rail services. The study assesses the ridership, operating and capital cost synergies by interconnecting the Ohio Hub to other existing and planned rail corridors including: the proposed 3,000-mile Midwest Regional Rail System (MWRRS), New York's Empire Service, Pennsylvania's Keystone Service, the Northeast Corridor and Canada's VIA Rail System. When linked together by the Ohio Hub, the regional rail corridors would serve over 140 million people or about half of the population of the United States. The study recommends that the Ohio Hub become part of the nation's federally recognized passenger rail network.