

***RAIL Magazine's* Priorities for High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail**

Although the first round of high-speed and intercity passenger rail projects have been selected by the Obama Administration, and some of those will begin operation in the next several years, it is also the perfect opportunity to better define how these projects work together to form a consistent approach that is designed to produce success. And while each project will and must focus on the specific needs and broader identity of the region or corridor it services, there are several principles that should guide policy-makers at all levels of government as we move forward in achieving responsive and efficient passenger rail services everywhere.

1 Build On Momentum with Increased Investment

The \$8 billion included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to support high-speed and intercity rail was strengthened by an additional \$2.5 billion in the 2010 budget to support additional projects and expand those already selected. Meanwhile, President Obama has indicated he plans to propose at least \$1 billion in high-speed and intercity rail investment in the coming years' budgets. While these initial levels of support for passenger rail are essential, they should be viewed as starting points and not fulfillments of the federal government's total commitment to the effort. High-speed and intercity rail systems must cross state boundaries in order to be effective, which necessitates an active federal role. Additionally, with state and local budgets in crisis situations, it is all the more urgent for the federal government to act, and to act decisively.

2 Mandate Connectivity

A high-speed or intercity passenger rail operation is only as good as the connections it offers once passengers reach a station. In communities worldwide, the most successful passenger rail systems are those that offer myriad links to local and regional transportation connections. Even now, communities in the United States have already prioritized convenient transportation hubs at which numerous transportation options are offered, like those in Sacramento, Calif., or San Marcos, Texas. High-speed and intercity rail projects must demand that easy connections to local transit, regional and commuter services, taxis, and pedestrian and bicycle paths are included at stations along their routes.

3 Incentivize Partnerships to Focus Growth

Transit- and rail-oriented development is by no means a new concept in communities across the country. For more than two decades, the approach of utilizing rail and transit facilities to drive economic development has leveraged the opportunities made possible by new transportation projects. Those benefits are no less real with high-speed and intercity rail efforts. Rail stations with well-integrated transportation connections are massive generators of activity and vibrancy in any community and act as a beacon to developers seeking strong districts and neighborhoods in which to invest. New projects should encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors by focusing on zoning requirements, density levels and other planning and development tools to make rail-oriented development activities easier to achieve.

4 Prioritize Good Design

The excellent article authored by renowned industrial railroad designer Cesar Veragara on page 24 speaks eloquently of the need for the design of passenger rail equipment, infrastructure and stations to be considered at every phase of a project. As he explains, the ultimate perception of a transportation service is determined by those who use it – and serve as its employees. Leaders and planners of high-speed and passenger rail projects must be cognizant of this reality as they go about their work and remember that – as Veragara argues – if something “costs a million bucks, it should look like a million bucks.” 