



Testimony

of

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine  
Mayor of Richmond

on behalf of

The United States Conference of Mayors

before the

Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

on

Amtrak Oversight

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Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee.

I am Timothy Kaine, Mayor of Richmond, Virginia.

I am pleased to appear here today on behalf of The United States Conference of Mayors, a national bipartisan organization representing mayors of the more than 1,100 cities with a population of 30,000 or more.

I'd like to tell you, very briefly, why passenger rail matters greatly to our cities, and why America's mayors strongly support passage of the High Speed Rail Investment Act, S. 1900.

All of you, I'm sure, recognize the growing problems our country faces as a result of gridlock on our highways and "winglock" at our airports.

All of us have experienced the delays and frustrations associated with our nation's overstressed transportation systems.

But I'd like all the distinguished members of this Committee to know that we mayors don't just read about these transportation challenges in the newspapers -- and we don't just experience it occasionally. We *live* it every single day. It's one of our major preoccupations.

That's because we own and operate many of the nation's airports -- and with counties, nearly all of them.

With our county partners, we own and operate more than 80% of America's highways and streets.

And, locally or in regional agencies, we own and operate more than 90% of the nation's transit systems – buses, subways, light rail and trolleys.

Because we're on the front lines of America's transportation systems, we can't just sit around and wait for others to solve our problems. We have to take the initiative, and must confront these challenges.

Yet, we know that to be successful, we must have partnerships to help move resources to where they are needed.

Mayors from all across the nation, and many others, including a growing and more vocal public, believe that our future transportation investment decisions must increasingly emphasize passenger rail. It is an undeniable fact that the voter is becoming more frustrated with their transportation options.

And, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee, I am sure that you would agree that the mayors are particularly attuned to this disenchantment.

This is why mayors are saying that now is the time to take the next step in national transportation policy and restore balance and vigor to our national system. We believe this can be accomplished by building the third leg of the stool: a national rail system that connects between and within our metropolitan economies.

At the mayors' Conference, we have begun to focus on identifying some of the critical elements of a rail policy for the nation as we enter this new century. And, to look at ways this nation can reverse a couple of generations of neglect and inattention to our nation's rail infrastructure, both for passenger and freight needs.

Earlier this month in Boise, I joined with more than 50 of my colleagues from all across the country at the Conference's Leadership Meeting. The Conference's President, H. Brent Coles, the Mayor of Boise, dedicated a significant portion of our agenda to the issue of rail in America and the need for additional investment in this infrastructure.

In preparing for these sessions, we looked at what is happening in throughout the U.S. For example, today, 47 of the 50 largest metropolitan economies are either planning or constructing new rail projects, be it regionwide or more localized systems. These projects are most commonly light rail or commuter rail projects.

To put these areas in perspective, I would note that these 50 metro economies account for more than 53 percent of our nation's total economic output.

And around the country, the total number of rail starts is astounding, with more than 200 projects – and potentially up to 400 – in more than 30 states.

Local areas are now committing billions of dollars to local rail projects, which makes us all the more concerned about the vitality and strength of the nation's intercity passenger rail system. These local rail projects, with their local bus and intercity bus connections, will link passengers to a national rail network, and vice versa, to form a more seamless transportation system.

And what's most noteworthy about these investments is the *local share* of the "new start" projects – which, on average, now exceeds 50%, showing the level of local commitment to rail investment.

Clearly, there is what we call a “railvolution” that is now underway in America’s cities – and it’s locally, not federally, driven.

All across America, our voters are demanding more choice and more balance in their transportation systems. More voices – and not just mayors and transit backers – are calling for an expanded national commitment to rail investment.

And, increasingly, there is an emerging consensus that such investment can also help us achieve important social objectives. These include improved mobility and choice, cleaner air and smarter growth.

Mr. Chairman, the nation’s mayors have no choice but to focus most of their efforts on local problems and issues. But we also realize that our urban transportation systems are part of a larger network. What the poet John Donne said -- “No man is an island, entire of itself” – definitely holds true of our cities and their transportation systems, as well.

We see a powerful linkage between a strong Amtrak, a growing national inter-city passenger rail system, and the long-term viability of our local and metropolitan economies.

That’s why America’s mayors have made “rail system restoration” a top priority, and strongly support the High Speed Rail Investment Act, S. 1900.

To put it simply, we mayors are enthusiastic about high-speed rail. We believe that, when fully-funded, the high-speed rail partnerships that have been formed between Amtrak and some 28 states will spark a revolution in 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation.

High-speed rail will boost our economy's productivity, increase safety, create jobs, and enable our highways and airports to fulfil their potential.

And by connecting downtown business centers served by rail, it will help local officials to use high-speed rail and other investments to grow smarter in their regions.

In conversations with our European counterparts, we have been impressed by their accounts of how high speed rail has helped revitalize their communities. We're convinced that high-speed rail will make a big difference to America's cities, as well.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot let this occasion pass without commenting on the strong partnerships between our cities and Amtrak.

Today, Amtrak already serves 45 of our nation's 50 largest metropolitan economies. And, we see real efforts by Amtrak to work in partnership with local areas.

We see positive trends on revenue and ridership. And frankly, we're excited – very excited – about the *Acela* service. Thank goodness North America is finally joining the rest of the industrialized world in deploying high-speed trains!

Mr. Chairman, as I'm sure you've already gathered from my remarks, I believe the future is bright for passenger rail in America. But it will take more energy, more commitment and more investment to deliver the services that the public expects.

And, most importantly, a balanced transportation system will require that you and your distinguished colleagues support S. 1900.

Mr. Chairman, once again I'd like to thank you, and the Members of this Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today.