

# RAIL Magazine's Priorities for the Nation's Passenger Rail Network

*"Because we know we can't build our economic future on the transportation and information networks of the past, we are remaking the American landscape with the largest new investment in our nation's infrastructure since Eisenhower built an Interstate Highway System in the 1950s. Because of this investment, nearly 400,000 men and women will go to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, repairing our faulty dams and levees, bringing critical broadband connections to businesses and homes in nearly every community in America, upgrading mass transit, building high-speed rail lines that will improve travel and commerce throughout our nation."*

– President Barack Obama, 2/17/2009

On Feb. 17, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into law. It provides the largest single-year investment in passenger rail, and public and community transit in our nation's history, a total of \$17.7 billion. In this spirit, we've prepared a set of priorities to leverage the opportunity of this moment into a lasting presence for passenger rail in America.

**1** Now that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is law, **every effort must be made by officials and administrators at the federal and state levels to ensure that investment is delivered quickly to passenger rail projects.** The Act provides unparalleled levels of support for rail transit and high-speed rail initiatives that are also proven methods of building economic development and creating jobs. It would be therefore counterproductive, and indeed dangerous to our nation's economic prosperity to allow this investment to languish through bureaucratic entanglements. Communities across the nation are eager to move forward with projects to build economic growth and better serve their needs through passenger rail service. It is imperative that governmental leaders share that same goal.

To help rebuild the American economy, we must build on the new foundation established by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. While governments at all levels have a role in supporting passenger rail, our federal leaders have the greatest means and resources at their disposal at a time when state and local bodies are facing massive budget shortfalls. Additionally, our transportation network is inherently national in scope, and the federal government has a long and active role in transportation investment. This trend must continue and grow.

**2** As our feature profiles in this edition of RAIL demonstrate, innovation is inherent in crafting and expanding passenger rail service. It is time, then, that **the newfound recognition our elected officials have placed in passenger rail is matched with an equal desire for the best possible achievements in new rail projects.** Just as the last quarter century has seen light rail, commuter rail and streetcars refresh the very definition of what passenger rail can accomplish, so too our new efforts must explore and implement the latest and greatest technologies, concepts and strategies available in the industry. This entails everything from truly realizing high-speed rail service to groundbreaking land-use development approaches to dynamic partnerships with freight railroads. New investment yields new opportunities, and the planners, engineers and officials involved in passenger rail must be ready for the challenge.

**3** **Increase investment.** Few activities generate the type of economic growth as passenger rail. Not only do new rail projects employ construction workers, engineers and architects over an extended timeframe to build them, but they transition into a permanent workforce of train operators, maintenance crews, dispatchers and station agents who facilitate their operations. Meanwhile, a look through the pages of this publication – and many others – will quickly chronicle the type of economic development passenger rail spurs in new retail, residential and commercial activity. Moreover, the society at-large receives the advantage of residents and workers who can easily access jobs, purchase goods and services, and acquire places to live. The combined return on investment from passenger rail initiatives produces benefits scored not in millions or hundreds of millions of dollars, but in tens of billions.

**4** While investment in passenger rail must be maintained and expanded, it is also time to solidify its new role in more authoritative legislation. In the summer of 2009, the transportation's surface transportation law, SAFETEA-LU, will expire. In its aftermath, **a new vision for surface mobility must be established, one that recognizes the vital role passenger transportation of all kinds plays in strengthening our nation and our communities.** The precedent established for passenger rail by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act must be a guidepost for reauthorizing national transportation legislation. More than just an increase in investment, passenger rail must be made a permanent and equal player in our nation's transportation policies, instead of relegated to the uncertainty of ad-hoc appropriations. 