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**Testimony of the Honorable Edward G. Rendell
Northeast Corridor High Speed Rail
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Rahall, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on high speed rail in the Northeast Corridor.

President Obama has ignited the nation's imagination with a bold 21st Century transportation vision with its centerpiece being a network of high speed rail corridors. There have been just a handful of times in our nation's history when we have had the opportunity to undertake transformative changes regarding our mobility. The building of the 363-mile Erie Canal is one such example. Regarded at the time by critics as "Clinton's folly" (New York Governor DeWitt Clinton), it has since been lauded as the engineering marvel of the 19th Century.

Once the Erie Canal became operational in 1825, its impact on trade and mobility was immediate as settlers poured westward and trade exploded. In

nine years Canal tolls more than recouped the cost of construction. And within 15 years of the Canal's opening, New York was the busiest port in America, moving tonnages greater than Boston, Baltimore and New Orleans combined.

The most transformative undertaking of the 20th Century was the construction of the Interstate Highway System. The mobility afforded to both people and goods by this vast network has greatly contributed to our nation's economic growth.

The construction of a state-of-the-art high speed rail system should be the defining transportation initiative of the 21st Century.

But in order to succeed we will have to be smart, strategic and make tough and honest choices about paying for a first-rate rail system – something this country has long struggled to do. While total public expenditures on highways, aviation and rail have grown over time, rail has lagged way behind the other two. According to the Congressional Budget Office, in 1956 total public expenditures on highways was \$6.9 billion, aviation \$334 million and rail at \$8 million. In 2004 total public for highways was \$120.4 billion, \$26.6 billion for aviation and \$1.5 billion for rail. Sadly that is only a fraction of

what our European and Asian counterparts have invested in their world-class high speed rail systems.

The French TGV has been up and running since 1981 and now achieves speeds of 199 miles per hour. The Japanese Shinkansen was inaugurated in 1964, at a speed of 130 mph, and is now up to 186 miles per hour. The Beijing-Tianjin train runs up to 217 miles per hour; the Shanghai maglev train achieves speeds up to an incredible 268 miles per hour. In 2009, China announced a plan to expand its high speed rail system to a network of over 16,000 miles by 2020 and invested over \$50 billion in this system. Later this year, when a new Beijing to Shanghai high speed line will open (a year ahead of schedule), those fast trains will cut to just four hours the travel time for the 600-mile journey between China's two most important cities. In addition, Spain plans to spend more than \$100 billion over the next decade to lay 6,200 miles of track and build Europe's biggest high speed rail network.

Yet here in the United States we have only begun to finance high speed rail with an initial investment of \$8 billion that was contained within the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Much of that funding was spread over high speed rail projects in 36 states so no single system could be built out in its entirety.

Building a first-rate high speed rail network will require public and political will to invest beyond the initial \$10.5 billion that has been allocated to date. California's system alone is estimated to cost at least \$45 billion. As I said, we must be strategic about our investments. And both the federal and state governments must step up to the plate. We also must carve out an appropriate role for private investment. The good news is that I and many other elected officials across this country stand ready to support the effort.

In 2008, I joined with then-California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to form Building America's Future. Our bipartisan coalition of state and local elected officials shares a vision for a new era of smart national infrastructure investments that will spur job creation and long-term economic competitiveness, address climate change and our dependence on fossil fuels, boost goods movement and enhance safety and quality of life for our citizens. Promoting investment in passenger rail is a key priority for our group.

For example, in 2006, Pennsylvania completed a relatively modest \$145 million improvement project with Amtrak to increase speeds on the Keystone Corridor to 110 miles per hour between Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The trip time dropped from two hours to 90 minutes and the result was a 26 percent boost in annual ridership from 890,00 to 1.1 million.

There are similar projects all across the country, where improvements to existing track and improved signaling can reduce trip times and spur big increases in ridership for relatively modest costs. There are a number of these that we should undertake. But with limited resources, we must be smart and strategic about where to invest. It is critical that these investments be made in corridors that have the most promise for success. And that means targeting corridors that have the population density and the proven ridership to make it work. There must also be local political support and a willingness of the states along the corridor to share in the costs. The Northeast Corridor is the ideal place to focus more of our resources to establish true high speed rail.

Earlier this month America 2050 released a report which studied potential high speed rail corridors of 600 miles or less around the country and scored them based on regional and city population size and density, employment concentrations, rail transit accessibility, air travel markets and the composition of job markets by sector. The report found that high speed rail works in very specific conditions, primarily in corridors of 100-600 miles where major employment centers are connected. Based on these criteria, it's no surprise that the highest ranked corridor was Washington to New York with Boston to New York a close second.

The Northeast Corridor is the nation's densest and most economically productive with its 55 million people and a \$2 trillion economy. Its population density is roughly 12 times the national average and *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 2008 that it was the world's second largest mega-region – behind greater Tokyo. If the Northeast was an independent country, it would represent the fifth largest economy in the world. Additionally, the Northeast Corridor moves more than 259 million passengers and 14 million car-miles of freight per year.

The complex air traffic system in the New York metro area has greatly contributed to congestion in our skies. Three of our nation's busiest airports (LaGuardia, JFK and Newark) are located within 25 miles of each other and approximately one-third of the flights departing from them have destinations within 500 miles, including 200 daily flights heading for destinations along the Northeast Corridor. And since so much of our nation's air traffic departs or arrives at one of these three airports, delays experienced here have a significant ripple effect across the nation.

Enabling true high speed rail in the Northeast Corridor would likely eliminate – or at a minimum reduce - the need for short haul flights meaning that the daily shuttles between Boston, New York and Washington would dramatically decrease in frequency or stop altogether. This means that those slots currently

being used for the shuttle could be used for longer, more profitable flights throughout the U.S. This would be a positive for both travelers and the airline industry because it will reduce delays in the system.

The other big advantage that the Northeast Corridor has is that Amtrak owns nearly all of the rights of way along the corridor. No other corridor in the U.S. can make that claim.

But there are some significant hurdles that must be overcome. There are issues with tight curves in many sections of the existing track which are an impediment to achieving top speeds. The Acela Express is capable of reaching a top speed of 150 mile per hour (mph) but averages only 70 mph. In order for top speeds to be achieved, rail lines need to be straightened and appropriate accommodations made with the freight rail companies and other commuter rail lines that share the existing tracks. Seven different freight railroads currently operate on portions of the Northeast Corridor. Ownership of the track is fragmented with Amtrak, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, Metro-North Railroad, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and CSX each owning various segments. Ideally, true high speed rail would be established with dedicated tracks to be used solely for high speed rail. However, that would increase build-out costs dramatically.

While there are incremental improvements we must make to our current rail system, in the end we must do much more. If all we wind up with is upgrading our existing 19th century rail technology, while our economic competitors forge ahead with 21st century rail systems, then we will not have succeeded in creating the kind of transformational change President Obama, Members of Congress, and so many others have envisioned.

States across the country are ready and willing to commit resources to this effort, but will need an ongoing and significant federal commitment. A true high-speed rail network will have a dramatic effect on reducing carbon emissions and we should be exploring ways to fund it through such funding sources such as gas taxes, VMT fees, tolling and congestion pricing, ticket surcharges and a National Infrastructure Bank.

Making significant investments in the Northeast Corridor to achieve true high speed rail must be our number one priority. No other corridor in the country has the population density and ridership as well as the economic wherewithal to result in successful and likely profitable, high speed rail line. The reduction in congestion in our airspace as well as in emissions from taking more cars off the road are important benefits that must be not be ignored. The travel time savings in reducing the time to get from Washington to New York to Boston will also greatly enhance our economic productivity. We must embrace a

bold vision for mobility in the 21st Century and high speed rail must be a vital part of that new vision. The Northeast Corridor will demonstrate the value of these investments to our entire nation.

Let's seize this moment.

Thank you, Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Rahall, and Members of the Committee. I welcome your questions.