

Statement of
The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, II
Hearing on
“Northeast Corridor High-Speed Rail”
January 27, 2011

I am pleased to be here in New York City at the Committee’s first hearing of the 112th Congress to discuss high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor.

In 2008, Congress charted a new course for passenger rail in the United States with the enactment of bipartisan legislation, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act. That law created two new national programs for the development of high-speed and intercity passenger rail. It also reauthorized Amtrak, which currently holds 69% of the air/rail market share between Washington, D.C. and New York.

After years of battling starvation budgets for Amtrak, congressional efforts to eliminate certain routes and a Bush Administration budget proposal to destroy Amtrak through bankruptcy, I am proud to report that, for the first time in decades, the 2008 Act set forth a new path for investing in one of America’s greatest assets: Amtrak.

In addition, that law created a process for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to issue a request for proposals from the private sector to finance, construct, and operate high-speed rail service in the 10 dedicated corridors and the Northeast Corridor. According to DOT, eight private sector proposals were submitted which were then forwarded to the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, DOT’s research center, for review. Volpe recommended five of the proposals for DOT consideration. The French National Railways submitted four proposals for development of high-speed rail in Florida, the Midwest, California, and Texas, and the California High Speed Rail Authority submitted the fifth proposal. I would note that no private sector proposals were submitted for the Northeast Corridor.

In the year after the 2008 Act, Congress provided the most significant investment in passenger rail since the creation of Amtrak in the 1970s. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided \$8 billion for development of high-speed and intercity passenger rail and \$1.3 billion for Amtrak capital improvements. An additional \$2.5 billion was provided for passenger rail in the Fiscal Year 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

These grants – for the first time in the history of Amtrak – have enabled the national passenger railroad to release the brakes and pull the throttle out of survival mode and turn its full attention to future service and equipment improvements to meet growing demands, including development of high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor, a plan which Amtrak unveiled last September.

While I am pleased with the continuing efforts to invest in and improve the Northeast Corridor, one thing I believe this Congress needs to remain focused on is developing a national program. After all, it was a national vision that led to the creation of the world's most advanced highway and aviation networks – helping to spur unprecedented economic growth, foster new communities, connect cities, towns, and regions, and create millions of jobs. The Federal Government, States, local communities, and the private sector all worked together to realize that national vision.

But it did not happen overnight. It took 60 years and \$1.8 trillion to get where we are today. That same national vision, which was established by Congress in 2008 and reiterated by President Obama in his *Vision for High-Speed Rail*, combined with those same partnerships, are what is needed to develop a truly national passenger rail system in the United States.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.