

Statement of Principles For Federal High Speed Rail Legislation

Presented by the *Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission*
October, 2001

The complete shutdown of our aviation system following the terrorist attacks of September 11 provoked a national crisis of mobility. Amtrak's role in ameliorating that crisis helped illustrate the need for a balanced, integrated national transportation system including intercity passenger rail – and especially high-speed rail – in major metropolitan corridors.

High speed rail offers a compelling travel alternative between cities up to 500 miles apart. Downtown to downtown trips can often be as fast as taking an airplane. Fast trains offer environmental benefits and save energy. Properly designed and constructed, high speed rail systems can unlock congestion, easing the burden on already crowded airports and highways.

Most important, high speed rail has an excellent record for safety and reliability. Particularly in bad weather, high speed rail arguably is the safest and most reliable form of transportation. To assure our future safety and mobility, Americans require a national network of high speed trains connecting our densest corridors.

More than 30 states have voiced strong support for high speed rail, and the federal government already has designated 11 corridors around the nation as offering the potential for new and faster travel. We applaud both the sponsors of the High Speed Rail Investment Act of 2001 (HR 2329 and S 250) and the Rail Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century (HR 2950) for their leadership in recognizing this national need, and urge enactment of legislation which:

1. **Reflects a substantial and credible federal capital investment.** High speed rail systems are expensive, but the federal government has committed 70 times more funding to highways and airports over the past 30 years than to intercity passenger rail. If Congress believes high speed rail is in the national interest, then Congress must make a substantial funding commitment now.
2. **Enables states and localities to advance passenger rail improvements quickly.** While direct appropriations may be preferable, innovative finance mechanisms for rail (including tax-exempt bonds, tax-credit bonds and/or federally-guaranteed loans) also offer the potential if properly structured to promote state and local participation in promising corridors.
3. **Infuses capital for rail in both the short- and long-term.** The nation requires immediate further investment in our existing passenger rail infrastructure – Amtrak – to assure continued safety, security and mobility. At the same time, a long-term commitment to rail, including the introduction of new technologies, is essential to support our predicted future transportation needs.
4. **Enables implementation of the high speed corridors with the greatest economic and transportation potential.** The nation cannot restrict high speed rail only to the Northeast. Other promising rail corridors nationwide – in the Midwest, the South, the West and the Northwest – can and must be built to enable Americans living in crowded corridors the freedom of transportation choice and mobility.
5. **Respects the rights and requirements of all rail stakeholders.** For high speed rail to succeed, it must operate as a *system*. Any new federal program enacted by Congress must promote the interests of all of the stakeholders that will make high speed rail work, including rail and construction employees, existing passenger and freight operators, and partner localities and states.

The Congress and the Administration should work to create a truly intermodal transportation system, passenger as well as freight, that helps pull the nation's transportation modes together in a systemic way that fosters safety and security, while promoting our mobility for the future.

About the Commission: The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission was formed by compact agreement among the **states of Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and North Dakota**. Our members are state legislators, governors and their designees. The Commission promotes, coordinates and supports improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest and the nation.