



Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Now Is the Time to Seize the Momentum on High-Speed Rail

The Biden Administration has demonstrated its historic commitment to passenger rail, including high-speed rail, with a record level of investment through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for passenger rail and billions of dollars of funding for key high-speed rail projects. There has never been a more pro-rail president than Joe Biden. **To continue this momentum on high-speed rail, we call on the Biden Administration, Congress, Amtrak, and private entities to take additional steps to outline and implement a vision for high-speed rail throughout the United States.**

The United States is on the verge of a watershed moment with respect to the development and operation of a high-speed rail network. For the first time, the country is on the cusp of opening a true high-speed train route with the April 2024 groundbreaking of the Brightline West project connecting Las Vegas and Southern California and the continued construction of the first segment of the California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR) project in the Central Valley of California.

Notably, the two most advanced high-speed rail projects in the country are working with organized labor to ensure that the construction, maintenance and operations jobs created by these projects are well-paid and covered by strong labor standards. Union workers are building CAHSR and the Brightline West project. Thirteen rail unions have signed agreements to maintain and operate both high-speed rail systems using rail workers. CAHSR, which has already created 12,000 high-skilled construction industry jobs, also has a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) in place with the Building Trades Unions. High-speed rail construction jobs are already helping to rebuild the middle class in places like California's Central Valley, a rural area long affected by high unemployment and poverty.

In order to achieve speeds of 200 miles per hour or more, high-speed rail projects require thousands of construction workers to build hundreds of miles of dedicated infrastructure — bridges, tunnels, and vast quantities of rail tracks and ties on top of a fixed guideway. Workers will also produce thousands of tons of steel and concrete that feed into the construction. American workers will also assemble and manufacture the high-speed electric train sets, longer than three football fields with capacity for more than 1,000 passengers.

Implementing a Strong Buy America policy is crucial to strengthen domestic supply chains, support American workers, and advance our nation's transportation goals. Moreover, it is required by law for all projects funded by federal infrastructure programs such as the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program. We must use this investment to establish a complete high-speed rail manufacturing supply chain, which includes car shells such as shell structure, frame, and vehicle paintwork. This will create high-paying jobs and ensure 100% domestic sourcing for future taxpayer-funded high-speed rail trainsets.

Amtrak also has a key role to play for the development and operation of high-speed rail projects. It has an established national network, including an extensive reservation system, existing rolling stock, statutory relationships with the freight railroads, a physical infrastructure that could be leveraged to support various high speed rail initiatives and decades of demonstrated compliance with all federal rail laws including Railroad Retirement, the Railway Labor Act and railroad safety laws. Amtrak has also partnered with state and local governments to provide passenger rail service for decades. Amtrak understands and adheres to the various grant requirements imposed by the federal government for passenger rail projects, including funds for high-speed rail.

Most importantly, Amtrak's experienced conductors, mechanical shop employees, signalmen, train dispatchers, carmen, and onboard service workers will be critical in rolling out and operating high speed passenger rail service. These employees have delivered Amtrak service to a growing national ridership, are the best trained passenger rail workers in the nation, and are well positioned to implement a high-speed rail program of this scope and size.

The progress on Brightline West and CAHSR has sparked interest in developing other high-speed rail projects, including the Texas Central High-Speed Rail project between Dallas and Houston and a Midwest High-Speed Rail network emanating from Chicago to St. Louis and other locations in the Midwest.

These projects won't be flashes in the pan. Through the Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID) established in the BIL, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has designated seven different major transportation corridors across the country where high-speed rail lines should be built, including a Pacific Northwest route from Vancouver to Portland, Oregon and a route from Charlotte, North Carolina to Atlanta, Georgia. The FRA is also expected in the future to designate more high-speed rail lines. Completing this network will require a multi-decade building boom on a scale unseen since the development of the Interstate Highway System 70 years ago.

To continue this momentum on high-speed rail, we call on the Biden Administration, Congress, and Amtrak and private entities to take the following actions:

Biden Administration

- Create an action plan to advance the new high-speed rail routes chosen under the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID) so they complete the necessary planning, design, engineering, and environmental review steps to be shovel ready
- Continue to designate new high-speed rail routes under the Corridor ID program
- Expedite robust implementation of the Build America, Buy America Act.

Congress

- Pass dedicated funding for the construction and operation of a high-speed rail network in the United States as proposed in legislation like the American High-Speed Rail Act
- Give the U.S. Department of Transportation the resources necessary to help oversee the planning, development, and construction of new high-speed rail routes.

Amtrak & Private Operators

- Engage labor unions from the beginning on the planning and development of new high-speed rail routes
- Commit to using union labor for all aspects of the project including:
 - Signing Project Labor Agreements with the Building Trades for the construction of any high-speed rail infrastructure
 - Sign memorandum of understandings with the Rail Unions for the operation and maintenance of high-speed rail routes
- Commit to complying with Buy America laws so that the materials and content used to build these projects are made in the United States

This is a unique moment in the history of rail transportation in this country. If all goes as planned, the Brightline West High-Speed Rail Project will be scheduled to debut at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles and showcase America's ability to build innovative and transformative projects.

Last year, the Biden Administration announced a \$6 billion investment in the CAHSR and Brightline West projects. By leveraging federal funding opportunities like this, we can finally meet a decades-long goal of bringing high-speed rail to this country, kick-start a new domestic manufacturing industry, and create tens of thousands of good-paying union jobs. Over two dozen countries – including France, Japan, Spain and the U.K. – already have high-speed rail systems. It's time America finally joins them.

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