High-speed rail is popular – public lobbying and state interest

**The Hill 10/22** (“Advocates for high-speed rail lobby for more after $8 billion in stimulus,” by Walter Alarkon - 10/22/09 06:00 AM ET, http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/64213-advocates-for-high-speed-rail-lobby-for-more-after-8-billion-in-stimulus)

Just months after winning $8 billion for high-speed rail projects in the stimulus, mass transportation advocates are pressing Senate appropriators for billions more in the 2010 Department of Transportation spending bill. Transit groups and urban Democrats want the Senate to accept the $4 billion for high-speed rail projects that the House included in its version of the spending bill for the departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development. Senate appropriators thus far have allocated just $1.2 billion for high-speed rail projects, choosing instead to spread more money to other types of transit programs. The Senate level is closer to the White House’s $1 billion request for high-speed rail. The spending bill has yet to go to conference committee. High-speed rail has already seen a significant boost in support over past years. High-speed rail projects received between $30 million and $50 million annually in spending bills but earlier this year received an $8 billion infusion in the economic stimulus package. The Obama administration, which had pushed lawmakers to fund high-speed rail projects in the stimulus, is now considering applications for the money from 24 states. California has asked for $4.7 billion for a high-speed link between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Florida has asked for $2.5 billion for a new line between Tampa and Orlando. The total cost of all the projects that have applied for funds is about $50 billion. Transportation advocates say the high number of applications is a sign of interest in high-speed rail and shows that more funding is needed to build a modern rail network. How much money Congress sets aside for high-speed rail projects for 2010 will tell the rest of the country how serious it is about high-speed rail, said John Krieger, transportation policy analyst for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG). “If they were to fund it in a big way, that will help keep the momentum going,” Krieger said. “If they were to do a much smaller allocation, there’s a chance this is a trend rather than the kind of legacy the Obama administration hopes it will be.” Krieger added it would take around $100 billion from the federal government to build a high-speed rail network. A coalition of rail proponents, including U.S. PIRG, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and Transportation for America, has been lobbying senators to support the higher funding level, arguing it will encourage more private-sector investment and create thousands of new jobs. “When the market opportunity is big, there will be a big reaction from the private sector,” said Arthur Guzzetti, vice president for policy at APTA. “If [the funding level is] a small incremental thing, you will get a commensurate response.” Top Senate appropriators have sought to spread money around to other transportation sectors. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), the sponsor of the Senate’s Transportation appropriations bill, took a “balanced approach” to funding transit projects, providing more funding than the House for highways, railroad safety and multimodal grants, which can be applied to different types of transit projects, said Alex Glass, Murray’s spokesman. “We also need to improve the conditions of our roads and bridges, to invest in public transportation and to create an overall transportation network,” Glass said. Both Glass and an aide to Sen. Kit Bond (Mo.), the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee for Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, noted that the Senate’s level of $1.2 billion for high-speed rail is still 20 percent higher than the president’s request. House members have shown bipartisan support for high-speed rail funding. In July, they defeated an amendment sponsored by Rep. Tom Latham (R-Iowa) to cut the funding for high-speed rail projects to $1 billion, the amount originally requested in President Barack Obama’s budget. The amendment lost, 284-136. In the upper chamber, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) has called on Murray and Bond to meet the House funding level. Schumer and other Empire State lawmakers have championed a high-speed rail link in upstate New York. “Fully funding this program is critical to expanding public transportation infrastructure in the United States, which in turn helps the country to mitigate some of the environmental, energy and congestion issues that plague our roads and airspace,” Schumer wrote in a letter to Bond and Murray.

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#### High speed rail is extremely popular in the I-4 Corridor

Real Clear Politics 3-31-11 [“Foggy Thinking in the Sunshine State”, [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/printpage/?url=http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/03/31/foggy\_thinking\_in\_the\_sunshine\_state\_109402.html]](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/printpage/?url=http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/03/31/foggy_thinking_in_the_sunshine_state_109402.html%5d)

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- You'd think that a state knocked cold by the real-estate meltdown would invest in a future not based on housing bubbles. And that if the feds dangled a bag of money to help it address a serious economic drag -- a gridlocked highway system that turns off tourists, retirees and business travelers -- you'd think the state would grab it. But this is Florida, where the recently elected Gov. Rick Scott has rejected $2.4 billion in federal money for a $2.7 billion high-speed train connecting Tampa and Orlando. Scott offers several reasons for this move, though not necessarily the real one. The Republican insists that Florida taxpayers would have to subsidize the line's operations, even though a state-sponsored study says otherwise. He notes that Tampa-Orlando is a relatively short 84-mile trip, and because the train would make stops, the trip would take almost as long as driving. This is true, assuming Interstate 4 isn't clogged with traffic, which it often is. (Orlando ranks seventh in the country for the worst traffic.) But the Tampa-Orlando run was to be just a first leg on a more ambitious bullet-train system. The bigger vision has trains turning right at Orlando and zooming down the crowded east coast to Miami. Tampa to Miami is 281 often tough road miles. This piecemeal thinking is indeed problematic, says Rush Loving, a railroad expert and author of "The Man Who Loved Trains." "The real market for the Tampa-Orlando run would have been from the airport to Disney World," he told me. That's not why you build bullet trains. "But there is a market from the Miami and Fort Lauderdale airports to Disney World." Consider my recent conversation with a helpful Thrifty car rental guy at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. Do you wish to buy a SunPass for the toll roads? he asked. No, I responded, I'll be driving on non-toll Interstate 95. Any other reason why I might need a SunPass? Well, he said, many drivers headed south to Miami on I-95 encounter such congestion that they switch to Florida's Turnpike, which is a toll road. Florida has been getting rid of humans who make change, so you need a SunPass at unmanned exits. OR you can go through the TOLL-BY-PLATE collection system, where a photo is taken of the license plate and a bill for that sum plus an administrative charge is sent to the rental company and added to your final tab. Suppose I were a jet-lagged tourist from Poland (or Portland). I'd think: What on earth is he talking about? I could visit the turnpike website and its "frequently asked questions," of which there are 26. One tells car renters who miss a toll, "Please contact the rental car company directly to report the missed toll and to learn their policy on toll violations." Is it now clear? OK, so why didn't Scott lunge for money that could have launched America's first bullet train and employed a bunch of jobless Floridians? Politics. Fast trains were to be President Obama's moon shot. Work on the Tampa-Orlando link was already so far along that it could have debuted in time for the 2012 election. The project is wildly popular in the independent-voter-rich I-4 corridor. Giving the people what they want might help Obama win Florida, so you can't do that.

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**High Speed rail is popular – alleviates congestion**

**The Independent 09** [“Obama signals US rail revolution”, Lexis Nexis]

**Impatience with road congestion and growing awareness of global warming means Mr Obama's vision of up to 10 regional high speed rail networks is likely to be politically popular. Encouraging him behind the scenes is Vice President Joe Biden, a self-confessed railway lover.**

**Moderate republicans like it**

**The New York Times** 2-14-**09** [“A Smaller, Faster Stimulus Plan, but Still With a Lot of Money”, Lexis Nexis]

**While most spending was scaled back** in the agreement**, one area saw a huge increase:** money for high-speed rail was quadrupled, to $8 billion. **High-speed rail is popular with several moderate Republicans being courted to support the stimulus package.**