

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

The 109th Congress created the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission to provide a national surface transportation vision, including policy and funding recommendations that will preserve and enhance the surface transportation system of the United States for the next 50 years. In working toward its goal, the Commission considered all modes of surface transportation, including intercity passenger rail.

The Commissioners found that little data was available for intercity passenger rail compared with other modes. To provide the Commissioners with this information and with recommendations for implementing a national intercity passenger rail system, Commissioner Frank Busalacchi established the Passenger Rail Working Group (PRWG). The PRWG is comprised of intercity passenger rail experts and transportation professionals.

ANALYSIS AND VISION MAP

The PRWG considered the historical role of intercity passenger rail in the United States, looked at today's passenger rail network, examined the costs and benefits of an expanded system, and developed a cost-estimate for its vision. In addition, the PRWG made federal funding recommendations and suggested a governance structure for program development.

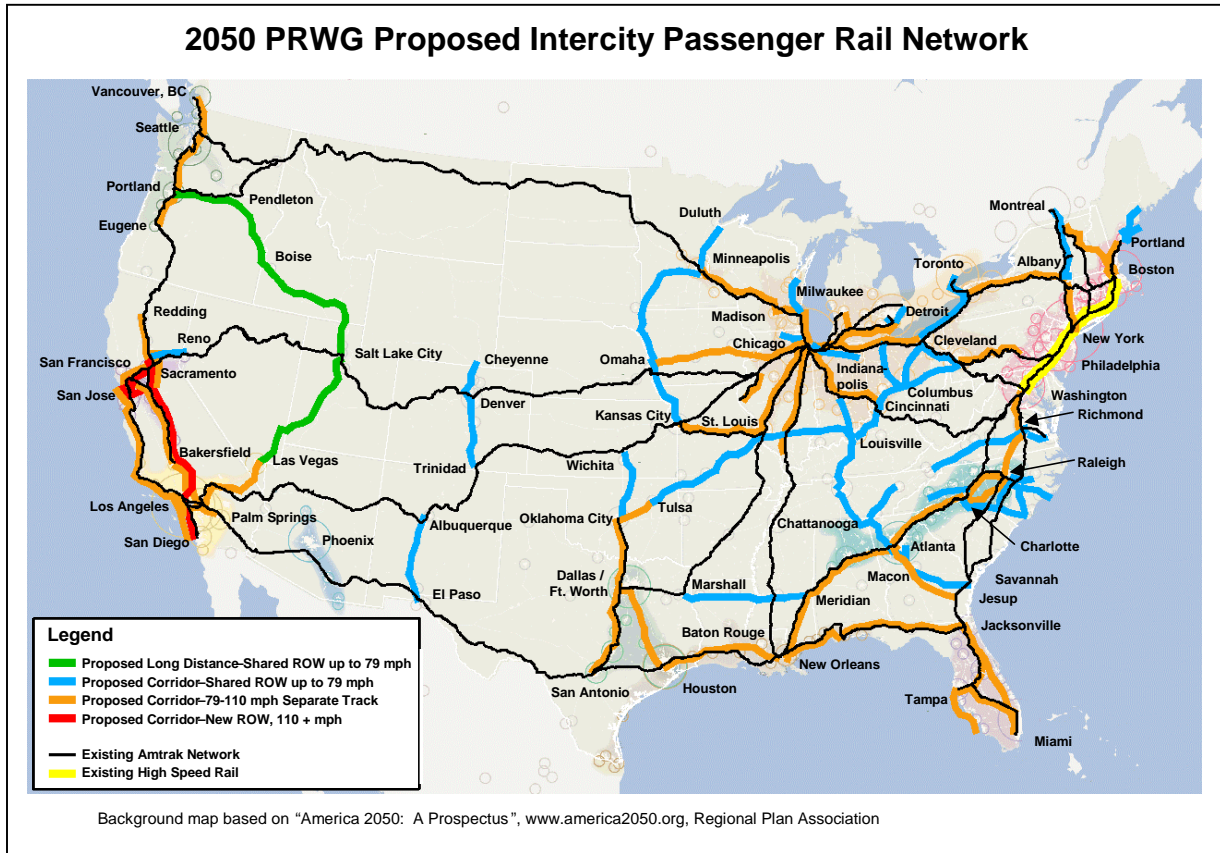
The PRWG used an overlay approach to develop its vision map, consisting of:

- a base layer of current intercity passenger rail routes;
- a second layer of federally designated rail corridors;
- a third layer of corridors in planning or development stages; and
- a final layer of potential future routes.

The PRWG used its vision map to estimate the investment level needed to implement its vision of expanded intercity passenger rail in the United States. The map is illustrative and does not necessarily constitute the exact routes to be included in the passenger rail network by 2050. The PRWG included some of the potential future routes because they are currently under consideration; they added others because they link major urban areas not currently served by intercity passenger rail. The PRWG believes that a national passenger rail network requires connections to major population centers, with service to rural

Vision for the future: U.S. intercity passenger rail network through 2050

areas along the way, much like the Interstate Highway System. Implementation of the PRWG's vision would ultimately provide passenger rail service to all 48 contiguous states.



The expansion of intercity passenger rail would improve the nation's transportation system by reducing congestion on other modes and offering mobility options to travelers. It would also address important national goals related to climate change and energy use. National data indicate that passenger rail is more energy efficient than air and auto transport and that its expansion will reduce CO₂ emissions, which contribute to global warming. Among the benefits analyzed in this report, the PRWG notes that intercity passenger rail can:

- relieve highway and airway congestion;
- improve public safety and air quality;
- reduce fuel consumption per passenger mile, potentially reducing the nation's dependence on imported oil;
- help mitigate the negative impacts of short or prolonged energy supply disruptions and energy price increases;
- provide land use and travel pattern changes that could improve air and water quality, as well as aesthetic appeal;
- provide mobility and economic development opportunities to smaller communities with little or no other access to public transport;
- assure a redundant transportation mode for use in emergency situations; and
- provide a mobility option for individuals who do not drive or fly.

INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL NETWORK COST ESTIMATES

The PRWG developed cost estimates for its national intercity passenger rail vision, with estimates segmented as follows:

- 2007-2015 (immediate needs)
- 2016-2030 (mid-term needs)
- 2031-2050 (long-term needs)

The estimates include the costs and timeframes of establishing new service as well as those for upgrading service (higher speeds, more frequencies) and for upgrading the current system to a state of good repair. The estimated costs are reported by time period in the aggregate and as annualized numbers.

Through creation of this model, the PRWG seeks to provide the Commission with a better sense of potential national system costs, more so than any other data set developed to date. The model provides a broad perspective and should not be relied upon to provide specific detailed information about any one corridor.

Intercity Passenger Rail Needs (2007-2050) (2007 dollars in \$ billions)					
	Infrastructure costs	Other capital costs (stations and recapitalization)	Rolling stock	Total capital costs	Annualized costs
Immediate (2007-2015)	\$50.2	\$2.7	\$13.4	\$66.3	\$7.4
Mid-term (2016-2030)	115.4	5.3	37.9	158.6	10.6
Long-term (2031-2050)	78.2	6.6	47.5	132.3	6.6
Total	\$243.8	\$14.6	\$98.8	\$357.2	\$8.1

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission’s vision is to “create the preeminent transportation system in the world.” For the last 50 years, the United States has had no vision for intercity passenger rail. In many areas of the nation, rail lines have been abandoned. Our federal funding policy emphasis has been on the highway and aviation systems, which are now congested. The Commission is taking stock of what needs to occur over the next 50 years. The PRWG believes it is time to rebuild a vibrant, intercity national passenger rail network that includes intercity corridor trains supported by the national framework of long-distance trains.

A balanced transportation system, including passenger rail, is critical for the nation's future. The PRWG makes five specific recommendations:

Recommendation #1:

Identify the national passenger rail network

The Commission should clearly articulate its vision for the passenger rail network to include the current national system, planned state corridors, and additional segments connecting medium-sized cities and high-speed corridors in densely congested areas. The key performance measure for the system would be the delivery of reliable, on-time passenger service that is travel-time competitive with auto travel. Other performance measures may include: congestion mitigation, safety and environmental benefits, and reduced energy use.

Recommendation #2:

Fund construction of the passenger rail system

To implement the PRWG's intercity passenger rail vision will require a funding and financing plan, specifically the creation of a new federal Intercity Passenger Rail Program. To implement the national and regional corridor vision, the PRWG recommends initial funding of \$5 billion annually for intercity passenger rail, including Amtrak funding and grants to states. The PRWG recommends the rail system be financed on a cost-to-complete basis and that the federal government provide 80 percent of the capital costs necessary to build the system.

Recommendation #3:

Implement the passenger rail network

The passenger rail network will promote national intercity travel and, as such, it should be a partnership among federal, state, and local governments. The institutional roles of different levels of government must be clearly defined to assure that passenger rail is implemented.

Recommendation #4:

Create a national rail strategy

The PRWG has outlined its vision for the future passenger rail system. The Association of American Railroads (AAR) has provided the Commission with an analysis of freight rail issues. The passenger system relies on the freight system for access to rail infrastructure; therefore, it is important to consider a process in which freight and passenger rail providers and other stakeholders can work to create the broad principles of the nation's rail strategy.

Recommendation #5:

Invest in data collection to support multi-modal transportation planning

This nation must recommit to investing in data collection to support transportation decision-making. The PRWG considers it critical that the federal government collect more detailed information about intercity travel patterns. Policy makers and planners need better tools to assess modal trade-offs as they evaluate transportation projects in the future.