“Why I’m Excited About California High-Speed Rail!”

From Rick Harnish, Executive Director MWHSR

California has made another big step toward building the country’s first 220-mph high-speed rail system. On Monday last the California High-Speed Rail Authority released a revised 2012 draft business plan.

I want to take just a few minutes to tell you why I am excited about the revised business plan and why we need to help turn the plan into reality by getting our California friends excited too.

There are two key reasons I like this plan - it delivers 300 miles of true high-speed rail in just ten years, and (more importantly) it treats high-speed rail as part of an integrated railroad network, not a stand-alone system. The high-speed rail project is now driving massive improvements in the entire statewide passenger rail network. Under the revised plan, this is no longer a simple discussion about a stand-alone segment in the Central Valley, and that’s very exciting.

If the California Legislature votes (hopefully this spring) to approve the plan, three commuter rail systems and three Amtrak routes will see dramatic improvements soon. Closing the gap between Bakersfield and the Los Angeles basin will also be expedited. In 2018, a new Northern California Unified Service will be launched, improving service between Bakersfield and Sacramento and the Bay. Finally, with the use of high-performance trains that can operate on both high-speed and “higher-speeds” track, this plan could have the potential to create an exciting, fully-integrated network.

California is leading the way for the rest of the country to develop high-speed rail by finding solutions to the many challenges faced in this kind of process. Rail projects throughout the country have already benefited from California’s leadership. They will benefit even more when the project begins construction. Having the California Legislature vote “Yes” will be a major breakthrough for California - and for the whole country.

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The plan delivers a lot of value upfront, but it is complex and unfortunately “complex” can be a hard public sell. That is why it is so important that you help educate your friends in California about how the state benefits from this plan and all that is involved in it.

We have updated the “phasing” section of the StandUpforTrains.org website. CLICK HERE for information to help you and your friends in California understand how the plan works. Then, by clicking on HELP NOW, they can easily send a message to their legislators asking them to vote “Yes!” for high-speed rail.

Please help us make high-speed rail a reality!

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. . . meanwhile in Michigan

In a May 10 press release, Amtrak announced schedule changes effective May 21 for Wolverine and Blue Water trains as a result of increased speeds of 110mph on the Kalamazoo to Porter IN segment of the Detroit-Chicago corridor. The release also stated “Permanent schedules changes are pending approval of NS for the Chicago to Porter, Ind., segment of the route and from CN, which owns the Blue Water route from Battle Creek to Port Huron and the Wolverine route between Pontiac and Detroit.”

Wolverine and Blue Water passengers can expect a return to more normal travel times between Kalamazoo and Dearborn with the lifting of speed restrictions imposed by NS on the Michigan route in March as a result of the completion of track and crossing improvements performed by NS in April.

A $3.2 M grant announced in early May will seek to further reduce travel times between Chicago and Michigan. The study will consider improvements needed to allow faster and more frequent service over the Chicago-Porter IN segment owned by Norfolk Southern and used by 12 daily Amtrak Trains. The FRA has also announced an agreement to provide for a new West Detroit Connection Track to eliminate a rail traffic bottleneck by separating passenger and freight train movements. The $7.9 M in federal funding will be matched by $7.9 million from the State of Michigan.

View the press release at tinyurl.com/marp00042.

. . . also noted

The Battle Creek Amtrak Station will reopen on June 12 with ceremonies at 1:30 pm. Renovations to the building and re-configuration of the multi-modal facilities were funded with a “stimulus” grant.

Amtrak and Trinity Transit are now providing thru-way connections from the Jackson station to Toledo, thus allowing Michigan passengers to connect with the Lakeshore route to Boston and New York City and the Capitol route to Pittsburg and Washington, D.C.

The Chicago Union Station Master Plan Study was formally presented on May 23 aboard a historic BNSF rail car. See www.unionstationmp.com. Click on “Download the Report” and scroll down to open the Appendices separately.

Hot off the Presses!

RULING IN AAR CASE SUPPORTS AMTRAK

CN had used this case to bolster its position regarding timekeeping. This ruling nullifies a key element of the freight railroad’s counter-argument in the complaint filed by Amtrak regarding time keeping. It is not known if an appeal will be filed.

See: www.courthousenews.com/2012/06/01/47054.htm