High-speed rail network could change U.S. travel

Obama outlines vision for trains

By Jim Abrams
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama on Thursday outlined plans for a high-speed rail network he said would change the way Americans travel, drawing comparisons to the 1950s creation of the interstate highway system.

Obama was careful to point out that his plan was only a down payment on an ambitious plan that, if realized, could connect Chicago and St. Louis, Orlando and Miami, Portland and Seattle and dozens of other metropolitan areas around the country with high-speed trains.

There's no guarantee that the nation has the political will — Congress has often tried to reduce support for Amtrak — or the hundreds of billions of dollars and decades it would take to build a comprehensive fast rail system.

"This is not some fanciful, pie-in-the-sky vision of the future," Obama said during an event at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, which is adjacent to the White House. "It is happening right now."

The only U.S. rail service that meets the Federal Railroad Administration's 110 mph threshold to qualify as high-speed rail is Amtrak's 9-year-old Acela Express route connecting Boston to Washington, D.C.

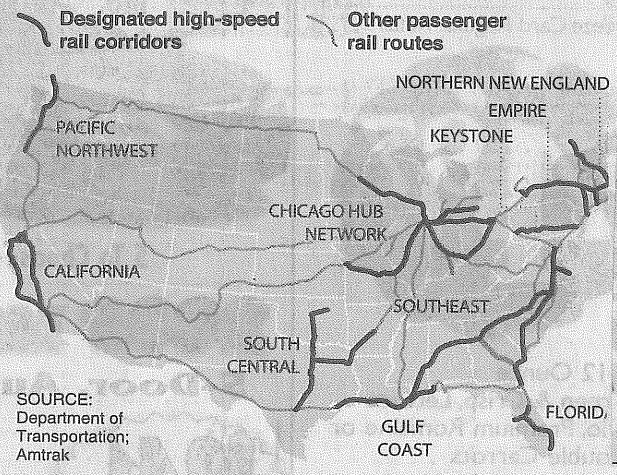


GERALD HERBERT / The Associated Press

President Barack Obama wants to expand the high-speed rail system.

Passenger rail upgrades identified

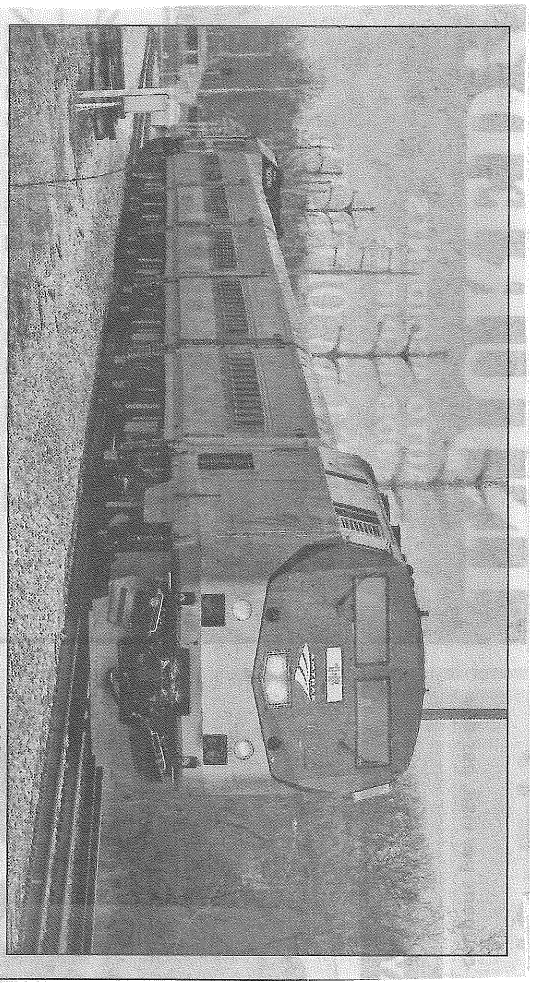
The Obama administration designated 10 passenger rail corridors f possible high-speed rail projects on Thursday. Funding is to come from the $8 billion allocated in the economic stimulus package.



SOURCE: Department of Transportation; Amtrak

Initially, regional transportation offices will compete for the $8 billion included in the $787 billion economic stimulus spending package for high-speed rail, bolstered by $1 billion a year for five years requested in the federal budget.

The $8 billion is part of $64 billion in the stimulus package for roads, bridges, rail and transit, what Obama called "the most sweeping investment in our infrastructure since President Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s."



SCOTT HARMSEN / The Gazette

This section of track in Amtrak's Michigan District is part of a high speed rail corridor between Kalamazoo and the Indiana border in southwest Michigan.