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Free Report Investigates How to Advance High-Speed Rail Policy in the US

Mineta Transportation Institute's research: Federally guaranteed state bonds should finance it

San Jose, Calif., July 3, 2012 – The Mineta Transportation Institute (transweb.sjsu.edu) has released its newest peer-reviewed research report, *Advancing High-Speed Rail Policy in the U.S.* This report builds on a review of international experience with high-speed rail projects to develop recommendations for a high-speed rail (HSR) policy framework for the United States. It concludes that the potential to reduce travel times coupled with improved travel time reliability and safety will be the most compelling points, and that the project funding mix be should be skewed heavily toward federally-guaranteed state bonds. Principal investigators were Senanu Ashiabor, PhD, and Wenbin Wei, PhD, with team member Zheng Fan. The free 72-page report is available for PDF download from transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2905.html

"We conducted an international review and looked at the experiences of Korea, Taiwan, China, and several nations in Europe," said Dr. Ashiabor. "These countries have pursued HSR to achieve various goals, which include relieving congestion on highway networks, freeing up capacity on rail networks for freight train operations, and reducing travel time for travelers. Some of the key rationales do not work well in the US context, while others do. For example, though congestion levels on US intercity highways are not at unbearable levels, most legislators know that additional capacity will be needed to support the increased demand generated by population growth in the future. HSR will be one of the key options for addressing this need."

The researchers believe one of the reasons the US continues to lack a firm HSR policy framework is that advocates have not developed a few key, compelling arguments that politicians can coalesce behind to push for HSR development. In the researchers' view, on-time reliability, improved speeds (shorter travel times), and relatively greater safety of HSR compared to other modes of travel are the most compelling arguments for HSR in the US.

The report notes that HSR lines work best in high-density, economically active corridors. Given the limited number of such corridors in the US, the study recommends that state bonds guaranteed by the federal government should be the primary funding source. This will ensure that the states benefiting directly from the projects pay most of the costs, making it more palatable to states that may not have HSR projects.

For projects that span multiple states, the report says, member states may have to negotiate the level of financial responsibility that each will bear. This would require detailed negotiations and financial setups not addressed in the report.

The report recommends other measures, as well. For example:

- The federal government must develop measures to designate a key agency and dedicated funding source, and to develop regulations and specifications for HSR design and construction.
- States that embark on HSR projects should start with formal legislation and put in place structures to ensure sustained political support throughout the project's planning and construction.

- The federal government also must move quickly to foster educational and training centers to develop the US HSR workforce.

The complete report includes figures and tables for illustration, along with a white paper about the California HSR project. Free copies can be downloaded from transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2905.html

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Senanu Ashiabor, PhD, is an MTI researcher who works at the Kittelson & Associates Oakland office (formerly Dowling Associates) in California. He has been involved in several interesting transportation planning and modeling research projects over the past ten years. Dr. Ashiabor is an active member of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and was on the ACRP panel developing the *Guidebook for Conducting Airport User Surveys*. He has authored/coauthored six peer-reviewed publications and presented his work at several technical conferences. Prior to joining Dowling Associates, he was a researcher at the Virginia Tech Air Transportation Systems Laboratory.

Wenbin Wei, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Aviation and Technology at San Jose State University College of Engineering. He received his PhD in transportation engineering from University of California, Berkeley, with minors in industrial engineering and economics. After graduating, he worked with the California Partners for Advanced Transit and Highway (PATH), Berkeley, from 2000-2001, and then joined American Airlines in Fort Worth TX as a research analyst. He moved back to the San Francisco Bay Area when he joined San Jose State University in August 2003. He teaches various aviation and operations research classes, mentors students, and conducts research for leading institutions, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Zheng Fan, is a PhD student in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Virginia Tech. She completed her Master's degree in engineering management from San Jose State University in May 2009. She has been a doctorate student in the program of Transportation Infrastructure and Systems Engineering at Virginia Tech since August 2010.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues, especially as they relate to transit. MTI was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA- LU. The Institute has been funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. Visit transweb.sjsu.edu or Twitter @minetatrans

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