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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Tammy Duckworth Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets Hearing on “Lagging Behind: The State of High Speed Rail in the United States” July 14, 2016

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing. Shortly after taking office in 2009, President Obama announced his strategy for modernizing our nations passenger rail system.

There were two parts to the President’s strategy. The first was to improve our existing rail lines to make current train service faster. The second part was to identify potential corridors for a world-class high-speed rail system.

In the press and elsewhere there has been a lot of focus on the second part of the President’s strategy. However, it is important to acknowledge the importance of improving existing rail lines. Just as a race car can’t run on a dirt road, you cannot run a bullet train on hundred-year-old tracks.

To address the need for modern infrastructure the President used the 2009 economic stimulus package to put millions of Americans back to work and allow States to upgrade existing rail corridors.

The Federal Railroad Administration has allocated \$10 billion to States through the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program, or HSIPR (Hiss-Per). They have used this money to fund 146 individual projects various States have developed.

These projects have already delivered real results. In five key rail corridors around the country, including two in Illinois, we have completed dozens of modernization projects, reducing travel times and improving the frequency, reliability and safety of service.

The average age of these five rail corridors is 135 years, and we have badly neglected them. But the investment in upgrading them is paying off. Once the funded projects are complete, these corridors can operate at speeds of up to 125 miles per hours.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to bring our transportation infrastructure into the 21st century, but the benefits of doing so are real. Private development follows Federal investment, which will prompt economic renewal.

In Illinois, we have seen the impact of these Federal dollars, and the private investment that follows. Today, we will hear from the Mayor of Normal, Illinois about what these Federal programs have done for his community, including keeping thousands of jobs in the Normal area.

However, despite the benefits this investment in our nations' transportation infrastructure brings, some Republican politicians have expressed significant opposition to these programs.

In Florida, Republican Governor Rick Scott rejected a Federal grant. This decision cost his state hundreds of millions of dollars in lost investment and upgrades. In Wisconsin, Republican Governor Scott Walker also rejected Federal funds, costing his state over ten thousand construction jobs.

Since 2010, the Federal Railroad Administration has requested over \$34 billion in additional funding to pay for the next phase of rail modernization efforts. Of this requested \$34 billion, the Republican Congress has granted \$0.

In fact, since taking control of Congress, Republicans have denied all additional funding requested for high-speed rail.

Today if we hear the Majority lamenting that we are lagging behind in our infrastructure investment, they should look in a mirror.

Twenty-first century transportation requires 21st century infrastructure, and that requires 21st century funding. Unfortunately, under Republican control, Congress, like so many of our bridges and tunnels, seems stuck in the 19th Century.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for calling this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, in particular on how the President's programs have benefited the people of Illinois.

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