

U.S. High-Speed-Rail Effort Gets a Boost from China

by Lena Platt and Michael Steger

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 6—The United States High Speed Rail Association held a conference in Los Angeles Dec. 2-4, attended by some 100 representatives of major transport and construction companies, including participation from China: from rail construction companies and a large financial delegation. The aim of the event, held annually in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco, is to accelerate the building of high-speed rail in the United States, starting with the ongoing project in Bakersfield, Calif. The California line, which is supposed to be completed around 2029 and will eventually extend from Los Angeles to a new transit hub in San Francisco, has both state and Federal financing.

Presentations from elected officials and industry representatives conveyed the urgency for high-speed rail (HSR) to stimulate an economic recovery in the United States, and to alleviate the terrible gridlock of the nation's freeways and airports. Another focus, due to the current decline of U.S political and economic thinking, was placed on the reduction of global warming by replacing CO₂-emitting automobiles with both high-speed rail and light rail for inner cities. This is also tied to the current state of financing for the California project, where 25% of all revenues from the state Cap and Trade Program will be dedicated to funding HSR in the state.

Lacking from the discussion, though implicit in the Chinese presentation, was the role of high-speed rail in raising the economic platform of overall physical production per square mile. This economic process was

FIGURE 1

The Association's Vision of a Four-Phase U.S. High-Speed-Rail System



best seen in President Lincoln's Transcontinental Railroad, which made accessible for development the Western part of the United States; it is now the motive for the rapid growth of HSR into the western parts of China and into Central, South, and Southeast Asia. As the new *EIR* report, *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge* shows, both a Bering Strait tunnel and a North-South corridor into South America through the Darien Gap are critical to the success of the California HSR project, as these sections, connecting continents, will not only accelerate the completion and extension of the California line, but will magnify by orders of magnitude its economic impact on the entire region.

'Doing the Impossible'

Keynote Speaker Jeff Morales, CEO of the California High Speed Rail Authority, abandoned the defensive

tone of the previous speakers, saying, “If they call you bad names, you must be doing something good,” and reminded the audience that “California showed the world how to do the impossible!” Referring to prior successful projects, he said, “Ansel Adams said the Golden Gate Bridge was an upside-down rat trap that would mar the beauty of the Bay,” and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system “was called a ‘train to nowhere’ which only passed the legislature by one vote, while the HSR passed by two votes!” He quoted Gov. Jerry Brown saying, “I would like to be part of the group that gets America to think big again,” and pledged to have the Central Valley segment completed by 2018, the Anaheim to Merced segment by 2029, and that the project will pay for itself ten times over in a short period of time.

Vital to the success of the project is the time frame for completion. The current deadlines are far too long, considering that over the next five years China will complete nearly another 17,000 km of HSR, adding to its already existing 13,000 km. A qualitative shift in the U.S. political and economic system, equivalent to joining the new BRICS development, is essential to the success of such important endeavors.

In response to a question from *EIR* on the role of HSR as part of a national mission, like JFK’s Apollo program, in addition to China’s leadership and the potential of the U.S. to join the BRICS’ New Development Bank, Morales replied that he fully expects other countries to be involved.

The Chinese Example

Later in the conference, referencing *EIR*’s question on international collaboration for a new national mission, Yufang Guo of China introduced two of his collaborators from the Tiesiju Civil Engineering Group, a subsidiary of China Railway Engineering Corporation: Vice President Gang Shao and Senior Economist Zhou Fangyuan. Gang showed a breathtaking video on the chronology of development of China’s national HSR network, from the early 1990s up through the present Gobi Desert section. The audience was floored!

The boldness and unabashed optimism of Gong’s presentation stood in stark contrast to all of the other videos presented during the conference, and dwarfed the plans of even those shown from Europe. There was no quibbling about environmental impacts statements, carbon footprints, or earthquake damage. The video,



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Artist's rendering of a future high-speed-rail station in California.

which highlighted China’s accelerated development during the last ten years, was reminiscent of the former idealistic and industrial U.S.A., and captured the imagination of everyone present.

The elected officials who addressed the conference expressed an undaunted intention to get this technology built in the the United States, with State Sen. Cathleen Galgiani and Palmdale Mayor James Ledford asserting that it must be done *now*.

The conference was attended by representatives of the most important sectors remaining in American industry. A number of firms involved in aerospace were excited to apply their technologies to HSR, while Mayor Ledford made reference to the dormant aerospace manufacturing potential that exists near Edwards Air Force in Antelope Valley. Ironically, this is also a proposed area for the California route.

Participants from the East Coast made reference to the recent Chinese contract for the upgraded light-rail “T line” in Boston, which includes a 400,000 sq ft factory in Springville, Mass. They saw this as an example the necessary revival of U.S. manufacturing, including the steel sector, and were more than enthusiastic about the possibility of future Chinese collaboration along these lines.

We need a fundamental political shift back to the American System economics of Alexander Hamilton. There is no longer room for the British free-trade system in the United States, and if high-speed rail is to flourish and advance our entire nation forward, the old British system of speculation must go the way of the buggy whip!