Update on the Coalition Efforts to Make the Proposed I-20 Corridor Long-Distance Passenger Rail Connection a Reality

Presentation to:
14th Annual Southwestern Rail Conference
Texas Rail Advocates
by Judge Richard Anderson
Chairman, I-20 Corridor Council
Magnolia Hotel       Dallas, Texas
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Proposed I-20 Corridor Long-Distance Train between Fort Worth and Atlanta (connecting with the East Coast and New York City)

We believe the establishment of this proposed long-distance Southern passenger rail connection will be of great benefit to our local communities, our states, our Southern region, and our nation.
By “connecting the dots” on this route between Marshall, Texas to Meridian, Mississippi through northern Louisiana, and creating an East-West passenger rail connection connecting to the East Coast, we open up a variety of new economic development, transportation, and other opportunities to communities along and near the route.
This particular rail initiative began in November 2006 when former Texas State Senator and then-Harrison County Judge-elect Richard Anderson proposed to fellow members of the East Texas Corridor Council that the Council take steps to accomplish its mission of working to establish a Southern rail connection along the I-20 Corridor by building a strong grassroots, multi-state coalition, enrolling the support of multiple Congressional delegations, as well as state, local officials, and other stakeholders from Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, as well as Arkansas and beyond.
Local, state, and regional benefits include:

- Economic development
- Job creation
- Boosting tourism
- Helping to decrease highway congestion
- Providing transportation alternatives
- Environmental benefits (including helping communities to reach air quality attainment)
- Helping smaller cities when airline connections are reduced or eliminated
- Providing alternate disaster evacuation route
- Enhancing quality of life
Reaching westward to our colleagues in Dallas/Fort Worth and reaching eastward to our colleagues in Louisiana and Mississippi, we have secured Memoranda of Understanding between four Councils of Governments, representing all 48 counties and parishes from Fort Worth eastward across northern Louisiana through Mississippi.
Throughout this process, it’s been a parallel strategy of working together to build relationships and a coalition around a common goal of establishing this mutually-beneficial passenger rail connection and continually working to determine what will make the route economically viable.
Our initial MOUs connected Texas and Louisiana regions, including:

between East Texas Region and North Central Texas Region
August 7, 2007 Mineola, Texas

between East Texas Region, North Central Texas Region, Northwest Louisiana Region
May 10, 2008 Marshall, Texas

between North Central Texas Region, East Texas Region, Northwest Louisiana Region, North Delta (Northeast Louisiana) Region
May 9, 2009 Marshall, Texas
To raise awareness about the beneficial impact that the I-20 Corridor long-distance train would have on our multi-state region, the grassroots, volunteer-driven I-20 Corridor Council has sponsored train rides for Texas and Louisiana elected officials, university and college representatives, business owners, other stakeholders, and the media.

Fort Worth Intermodal Transportation Center
In early 2014, members of the Corridor Council reached out to our colleagues in Mississippi with the Central Mississippi Planning & Development District and the East Central Planning & Development District, as well as to the Southern Rail Commission chaired, at that time, by Mayor Knox Ross of Pelahatchie, Mississippi, to request a Resolution to build on the rail studies and the MOUs in Texas and Louisiana.
RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION

To urge and request the Mississippi Legislature and the Mississippi Department of Transportation to ensure that the Central Mississippi Planning & Development District and the East Central Planning & Development District join with their respective Councils of Government in Texas and Louisiana, and are included in the ongoing Interstate 20 regional passenger rail corridor studies being conducted by the Ark-La-Tex Corridor Council [hereinafter the “Council” but formerly the “East Texas Corridor Council] as well as the study being conducted by the State of Louisiana. The purpose of these feasibility studies will be to re-establish regional passenger rail from Dallas/Fort Worth Texas to Meridian, Mississippi, so as to provide transportation alternatives for the residents of the respective states.

WHEREAS, the Council is presently concluding a feasibility study commenced in 2012 [the “Texas Study”] on securing regional passenger rail [70-110 mph] for the Interstate 20 Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Study includes the feasibility of daily Amtrak routes between Dallas/Fort Worth and Bossier City and Shreveport, as well as funding possibilities to include a public-private partnership with annual contributions made by the states of Louisiana and Texas; and

Resolution signed on March 7, 2014
In January 2015, at the Southwestern Rail Conference in Dallas, Judge Richard Anderson, Chairman of the I-20 Corridor Council, proposed and requested to Mr. Mark Murphy, Amtrak Senior Vice President for Long Distance Services, that Amtrak study the economic viability of this Southern passenger rail connection as a long-distance train from Dallas/Fort Worth to Atlanta (815 miles) and on to Washington, DC and New York City.

Mr. Murphy agreed to do so. Within five months, a second internal Amtrak study determined that the route was economically viable without ongoing state subsidies.
The feasibility analysis reflected that the I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail connection would:

...require **no** annual operating subsidy for the states through which this long-distance route traverses.

...operate over existing railroad infrastructure (right of way) with no need for the exercise of eminent domain.

...travel at the currently authorized maximum speed of 79mph.

...envision two trains daily (one eastbound, one westbound). For Fort Worth, Dallas, Mineola (Tyler), Longview, and Marshall who have *Texas Eagle* service, this would mean four trains daily between East Texas cities and Dallas/Fort Worth.

One-time capital expenditures for capacity improvements would ultimately need to be negotiated with the various host railroads, with the assistance of state and/or federal grants or funding.
With the economic viability established for the long-distance train, the I-20 Corridor Council, Southern Rail Commission, and Amtrak held meetings in late September 2015 in Shreveport, Marshall, Dallas, and Fort Worth to inform the coalition of the exciting new developments and to discuss next steps.

These meetings included more than 60 elected officials and coalition members from northern Louisiana and East Texas.
This also included meetings in Dallas and Fort Worth with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings, Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins, and Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price.
On February 17, 2016, specifically timed to coordinate with the Gulf Coast inspection train, a letter was sent to the Governors and Congressional delegations of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

The letter was written to urge their support of the proposed I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail service, in addition to the Gulf Coast connection.

The Corridor Council worked in coordination with the Southern Rail Commission and Transportation for America on the letter, as well as obtaining the signatures of the Louisiana and Texas mayors along the I-20 Corridor route.
With regard to initial grant funding, in 2007 and 2008, then-U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas (now United States Permanent Representative to NATO) was instrumental in working with the Corridor Council to obtain two federal grants totaling almost $740,000.

The Corridor Council has used a portion of its grant funding to fund feasibility studies of the route with Amtrak and TXDoT.

The Corridor Council worked with TXDoT and Amtrak in 2016 to obtain an extension from the Federal Railroad Administration for the approximately $590,000 remaining of the I-20 Corridor Council funds.

The remaining funding from the federal grant obtained by the Corridor Council was used to fund a three-state Capacity Study.
Brief Report of the Recently-Completed
I-20 Corridor Capacity Study

The essential purpose of the capacity study was to determine the potential impact of increased passenger rail traffic on the existing freight traffic along the I-20 Corridor route and to determine the capacity improvements that would be needed to assist the host railroads in this regard.

Since the host railroads--Union Pacific, Kansas City Southern, and Trinity Railway Express--own the tracks, yet are required by federal law to accommodate passenger rail travel, this is an essential starting point for any negotiations for shared use of the tracks.

The capacity study represents a proactive approach, inasmuch as it was initiated by the I-20 Corridor Council working with TXDoT, to establish a framework for negotiations between the I-20 Corridor Council, Amtrak, TXDoT, the FRA, and the host railroads.
The I-20 Corridor **Capacity Study** was completed in December 2017 through the combined efforts of the Texas Department of Transportation, I-20 Corridor Council, Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M, the University of New Orleans Transportation Institute, the National Center for Intermodal Transportation for Economic Competitiveness from the University of Mississippi, and the engineering firm HNTB.

Our thinking was that having the three educational institutions from our three partner-states participate in this study would not only lend their expertise to the study but would also enhance our efforts to enlist additional support of federal elected officials in all three states.
In conclusion, our strong multi-state coalition continues to be steadfast and enthusiastic in its support of the proposed I-20 Corridor long-distance train and the positive results of the I-20 Corridor Capacity Study are in...
So, we look forward to the important next steps in the ongoing work to establish the I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail connection between Fort Worth and Atlanta and to continuing our strong relationship with Amtrak, now, as you know, under the leadership of the new President and CEO, coincidentally named, Richard Anderson.
We appreciate your support of the Proposed I-20 Corridor Long-Distance Train between Fort Worth and Atlanta (connecting with the East Coast and New York City)