

# Debate Government's Role in Saving Rail

Faced with the Bush Administration's determination to shut down the U.S. national passenger rail system, AMTRAK, U.S. Congressmen and Senators on both sides of the aisle, have plunged into an intensive debate over the role of government in relation to rail infrastructure. Hearings held April 21 in the Surface Transportation Subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee featured a surprising convergence of views between Committee Chairman and conservative Mississippi Republican Trent Lott, and FDR Democratic Senator from New Jersey, Frank Lautenberg. Both agreed that necessary infrastructure, such as passenger rail, cannot be expected to pay for itself, and must be supported as an essential service by the Federal government.

A more limited debate occurred before a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee on April 27. Following that, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure voted out a bipartisan bill (H.R. 1630) to fund AMTRAK at a level slightly higher than the \$1.8 billion AMTRAK President David Gunn had testified was essential—at \$2 billion a year, for each of the next three years.

This Committee of the House also passed bipartisan legislation which calls for Federal funding of high-speed rail, including some magnetically levitated lines. The Railroad Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century (RIDE 21) would “pump \$60 billion into new and improved rail infrastructure across the country . . . help create thousands of new jobs while preserving the rights of rail workers under existing collective bargaining agreements.” Funding would be provided by bonds floated by the states, or interstate compacts.

The RIDE 21 bill (H.R. 1631) will now be sent to the full House for debate and a vote. Ranking committee member James Oberstar (D-Minn.) welcomed the high-speed/maglev bill saying, “It is shameful that the United States, the world's leading economy, is a third-world country when it comes to passenger rail.” He went on to praise high-speed rail for its relieving effects on congested highways and airports.

The bills will now have to be scheduled for debate by the full House of Representatives, and whether to schedule such a debate is up to the GOP leadership. Were the bills voted up and adopted, the U.S. Senate would also have to craft and adopt similar legislation before anything could be sent to the President for signature. As of now, the Senate has not drafted any such legislation for either rail system. The House bills are budget-setting bills, and were they adopted, there still would have to be a process to get the funds appropriated for spending.

In fact, the LaRouche movement's intervention into the Congress, including through the written testimony reproduced below, aims at forcing an even more ambitious plan. The Senate Subcommittee debate indicated bipartisan openness to such an approach.

In his conclusion, Lautenberg said that rail service, like essential air service, is necessary. “That's what government is for,” he said.

Lott responded in effect: I have to agree. The Federal government has a role in doing things which individuals, communities, and states cannot do for themselves. I look forward to working with you [Sen. Lautenberg] in the Congress to solve these problems.

Lott, who treated the Administration representative who came to present the destroy-AMTRAK plan with scorn, asked each witness for his view of the proposal to create a national transportation funding authority, which would finance development of new transportation infrastructure by sale of bonds offering Federal tax advantages. After their answers, Lott responded, “I await your answers, because this is what we'll do.”

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## LPAC Testimony to Congress

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# Fund National Rail To Rebuild Economy

*A hearing of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia, of the House Committee on Appropriations, on the topic of the Federal Railroad Administration and AMTRAK, took place on April 27, 2005. The Lyndon LaRouche Political Action Committee (www.larouhepac.com), submitted testimony for the hearing entitled The U.S. Economy is in a Breakdown Crisis: Fund a National Rail System As Part of Emergency Measures To Rebuild the Economy. The LaRouche PAC testimony was prepared by Marcia Merry Baker and Mary Jane Freeman, on April 20. The submitted testimony follows:*

Dear Chairman Knollenberg, Rep. Olver, and Members of the Committee:

The question of funding and continuing AMTRAK pose two inter-related matters to this hearing, and to the 109th Session of Congress at large: 1) The U.S. economy, and world dollar-based financial system is now breaking down; and 2) infrastructure-building—in particular rail transportation, which on its own merits should never have been down-