

Renewed Push for Texas High-Speed Rail Could Spark a U.S. National Effort

by Marcia Merry Baker

At a Dallas, Texas conference sponsored by the Texas Rail Advocates in late January, transportation expert Hal B.H. Cooper, Jr., Ph.D., P.E., made the case for resuming commitment to the Texas Triangle High Speed Rail Project. The concept, which goes back to the 1930s, is to connect Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, by a 750-mile electrified high-speed rail corridor, carrying passengers, freight, and trucks. Magnetically levitated rail (maglev) has also been proposed for the routes. Below are excerpts from Cooper's prepared conference paper, given Feb. 1, titled, "The Past, Present, and Future Development of the Texas Triangle High Speed Rail Project and the Reasons Why It Did Not Work in the Past, Along with What We Can Do to Make It Work in the Future."

Cooper, a surface transportation specialist, is a longtime advocate of building a worldwide network of rail corridors. He has campaigned especially hard for the crucial link-up across the Bering Strait, for a Eurasian Rail Land-Bridge, with a new rail grid for the Americas. During 2007, Cooper spoke at the Schiller Institute international conference in Kiedrich, Germany in September, and at the *EIR* conference in Ottawa, Canada in October, both dedicated to the Land-Bridge concept.

Based in Seattle now, Cooper's early career was in Texas, where he taught at Texas A&M University and the University of Texas in Austin. In 1983, he and others formed a consortium called the Texas Railroad Transportation Co. to advance the Texas Triangle Project. Beginning in 1984, the German company Siemens also formed a consortium to get involved in the Texas plans. Later, the French TGV interests became active, and sent their representatives to the Dallas Rail Advocates conference. But to date, all these initiatives have failed.

There are similar priority high-speed rail projects intended for key corridors in many parts of the United States, that all have been stalled out for decades. Only the Boston-to-Washington, D.C. corridor has seen high-speed development with the Amtrak passenger service. Cooper is an activist among the engineers and regional leaders who are keeping the idea of the projects alive. A national conference on transportation corridors took place in St. Louis this past January, where rail backers set plans to continue organizing.

Cooper's idea for funding regional rail projects is for collaboration between public and private entities, in a govern-

ment-fostered environment of infrastructure promotion, with regulation overall, as was done traditionally in the United States, as in the Pennsylvania Railroad, the New York Central, and others. This is the hallmark approach of the American System, where private rail and other utility companies, operate within government regulations for the public good.

However, given today's unfolding epic financial crash, there is no prospect for investment in projects from "the markets" now, just as there has been no investment for U.S. infrastructure development during the past four decades of the spread of the speculative bubble economy. Meantime, infrastructure is collapsing.

What is required is a break with the collapse process, a financial reorganization, and a rapid return to infrastructure-building. Lyndon LaRouche is leading the international drive to bring this about on an emergency basis.

Mussolini-Style 'Infrastructure'

In complete opposition to such a development approach, there are demands for outright Mussolini-model "infrastructure," coming in the form of "Performance-Based Infrastructure" (PBIs), as California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is calling it, otherwise known as PPPs—Public-Private Partnerships, or prior to that, privatization. The leaders of the pack are George Shultz and Felix Rohatyn, whose signature collaboration is for privatizing the military. The newly announced Rebuilding America's Future Coalition, put forward by Schwarzenegger and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, is a direct call for Mussolini-style corporativism.

In Texas there is turmoil over such a corporatist scheme foisted on the state six years ago. In January 2002, Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) announced the Trans Texas Corridor plan, calling for a statewide grid of corridors carrying highways, rail, electric, fiber optic cable, natural gas, and other lines. Behind the nice talk was the intent to sell off looting rights to future toll revenues to the international cartel Cintra, and to other companies, in exchange for pledges to start highway construction. An uproar ensued over the whole rip-off, especially from local landowners, who don't want their property to be appropriated for the 1,000-foot-wide highway corridors. In addition, the Trans Texas was denounced as part of the "NAFTA Super-Highway" system.

One week before the Rail Advocates conference, 1,400

people came to a meeting in Victoria, Texas, to protest the Trans Texas operation. The program is now partially on hold, pending review by the legislature.

In the eastern states, a similar PPP rip-off scheme, involving Halliburton as toll collector, was in the works in recent years for the North-South Shenandoah Valley Corridor. In this scheme, a 12-lane highway for truck and passenger traffic would be built and operated—no rail improvements—in plans drawn up by Kellogg Brown & Root (a subsidiary of Halliburton until 2007), and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). On Jan. 16, VDOT announced that the consortium is cancelled.

Cooper reports that rail corridor advocates see this cancellation, and the nationwide disaster in highway congestion and maintenance, as an opportunity to renew their efforts to force through rail projects. The issue is funding. In turn, that means facing the reality of the financial breakdown crisis and fighting for the nation-building emergency measures advocated in

the LaRouche plans.

On Feb. 1, in Dallas, John Barton, Deputy Assistant Director of Texas Department of Transportation, said that Texas has no money and is looking for help in funding transportation. The state can barely maintain its roadways with the NAFTA traffic, and has no means at all for new projects. VDOT is in effect saying the same in Virginia. In Pennsylvania, in January, the Rendell administration put out bids to private companies, for long-term leasing of the famous Pennsylvania Turnpike.

This kind of demoralization is what is addressed by the Schwarzenegger/Bloomberg Mussolini “infrastructure” option. Their typical rhetoric is in a letter they wrote to the *New York Times* (Feb. 1), “Our country needs a new, independent approach to infrastructure, one that provides sufficient financing and weighs projects based on merit, not politics. . . .” But taking infrastructure decisions out of the hands of government, can only be described as traitorous.