

... to do this on their own.”

On Jan. 28, Texas Gov. Rick Perry unveiled his state transportation plan, the “Trans-Texas Corridor,” calling for some 4,000 route-miles of rail and highway to be built, based on state funding authority. The map shown of this very ambitious undertaking, projected over two generations, is the “conceptual” sketch from the Texas Department of Transportation. Perry speaks in terms of \$175 billion in public and private money, over 50 years.

Trans-Texas Corridor

As described in his press release, “The corridors will [each] consist of six highway vehicle lanes—three in each direction—and six rail lines—three in each direction. One rail line will be dedicated to high-speed commuter rail, one to high-speed freight rail and one dedicated to short-haul regional rail, which could serve as the backbone of a local commuter railsystem serving all Texans.” The rail is to be built at the same time as the roads. There will be built-in easements for oil, natural gas, electric and telecommunications lines, even water lines and lift stations.

Funding? The Trans-Texas outlines four funding mechanisms, and authorizes the Department of Transportation to make public/private partnerships. To begin with, “Toll Equity” is intended to “jump start” construction, by attracting seed money to invest in future toll revenue. In addition, the “Texas Mobility Fund,” recently enacted, is seen as a framework for the State Transportation Department “to dedicate general revenue funds to bond construction of some projects.”

Politics and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are heavy co-factors in the release of the Trans-Texas Plan. Perry is making his first electoral bid for governor in this year’s mid-term elections, after being appointed to fill out George Bush’s term. Texas is geographically the natural corridor for NAFTA’s “free trade” routes, and its rail, highway and water infrastructure—which were already inadequate as of 1990—have deteriorated drastically since NAFTA suddenly intensified truck traffic and other flows.

Interview: Hal Cooper

‘Transport Corridors Are The Right Approach’

After Texas Gov. Rick Perry’s announcement that Texas would begin building the Trans-Texas Corridor, EIR interviewed transportation consultant Hal Cooper.

Cooper: I understand Governor Perry’s proposal is for

\$174 billion [over 50 years] for 4,000 miles of transportation corridors. This is the first proposal of any kind that begins to approach the LaRouche policy for transportation corridor development, and integrated economic development. . . . It will provide a good start. I think that the idea that we can have railroads, and roads, and utility corridors and pipelines and so forth, all in the same corridors, is exactly the right approach. And Governor Perry’s proposal is basically that.

I understand the first corridor would be from Laredo to Dallas. That, of course, would be for passengers, and also for taking trucks off the road. It would seem to me that that particular approach is absolutely essential, when you’re dealing with the question of the truck traffic. There has been a whole lot of discussion about the safety features of Mexican trucks. . . . The answer is, the trucks that are coming to and from Mexico, shouldn’t be going on the road! They should be going on the train. And then, we have American drivers drive them in the United States, and Mexican drivers drive them in Mexico. And I have never heard any discussion, or any proposals to do that by any political leader. Including by our Sen. Patty Murray, here in the State of Washington, who is the one who led the fight against the Mexican trucks.

EIR: How does the “Trans-Texas” fit in with your view of linking North and South America for real development, not NAFTA schemes?

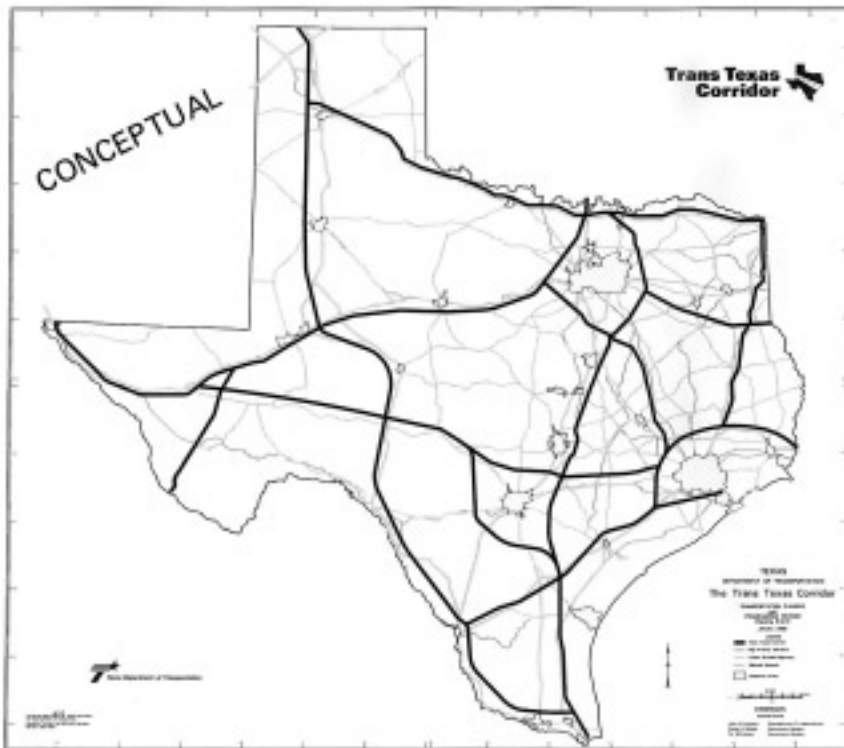
Cooper: I see Texas as like the hub of a wheel, if you are looking only in a north-south, and east-west direction. Excluding Mexico, for the moment.

First of all, is the Central North American Corridor—up to North Dakota, from Texas. This is, of course, going from Eagle Pass, all the way up to North Dakota, on the Great Plains. That is something that provides the most direct route between Alaska and Central America, if you are looking at an intercontinental system, for rail.

Now in addition to that, Governor Perry’s proposal of the Interstate 35 Corridor, from Laredo up to Dallas, should be extended all the way up to Duluth, Minnesota. . . .

In addition to that, we need the corridor from Houston to Los Angeles, of course, going east to New Orleans. And one going to Chicago. All these things are like spokes of a wheel. I think this is what Governor Perry’s proposal begins to address.

But the problem is, the railroads are not factoring in the passenger transportation, or—to the extent that they need to—the intermodal freight, and especially the movement of trucks off the roads, onto the trains. That needs to be done. . . . We need to get off this “Point A to Point B,” where we don’t serve any of the intermediate cities, because we juggle the economics so that “it doesn’t work,” when it fact, it really should. And all those intermediate communities need to be served, because then, things could work in a viable way between road and rail. Otherwise, they can’t. This has



Texas Governor Perry's long-term idea for development of combined road-rail-infrastructure corridors across the state. Lines reaching to the north could make this a large hub for rail corridors from Alaska to Central America, and from Southern California to the Gulf of Mexico.

been a sad lot. But I think Governor Perry's proposal is the first thing that I've seen, that actually begins to address these questions.

EIR: So you are saying, it adds to the agenda of discussion?

Cooper: I want to make a specific proposal: I think, on the Interstate 35, the concept that I talked about on the West Coast—the proposal for the road and rail, and utility and pipeline corridors [from Vancouver, to Tijuana]—could be very well [replicated] on Interstate 35, between Laredo, and Duluth, Minnesota. You have a corridor that has a number of major areas. You have a truck traffic level that averages 5,000 to 7,000 a day. It's a little bit less than Interstate 5 on the West Coast, but it's certainly plenty. And you have several major metropolitan areas in between: San Antonio, Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Des Moines, and the Twin Cities [Minneapolis-St. Paul]. All those are along the corridor, and there is plenty of justification for [rail] traffic.

That's why I think you would need to develop a rail corridor. But there, now, the rail is kind of fragmented. It's under different ownerships, and there are certain places where there is no rail. That needs to be done, just as well as the road, and not just focus on the Interstate highway.

EIR: So you are stressing the continental scale of development?

Cooper: Right. But Texas is really the only state that is so large in geographic area. The only other one would be California. Alaska is far away, and not that big in population. But Texas is a very big place, and it's probably one of the few places that you could begin to develop this kind of concept within one state.

California should be doing what Texas is proposing, but so far, we don't hear that kind of proposal coming from anywhere in the state of California.

EIR: There is also the funding question, in the discussion.

Cooper: There is something that you need to emphasize. Toll roads are really of questionable economic viability. . . . If you are trying to use that approach with roads, as compared to paying for the shipment of goods and people on trains, rail is a far more viable approach, which tends to produce a much higher economic rate of return than the roads. You are fighting a losing battle with roads, because your capital costs

are higher, and your maintenance cost is astronomically higher—especially when you start running lots of trucks on the roads.

So, you are better off putting as much as you can into the rail, and getting far more value for the money you are spending, than you are in roads—both from a capital, and from an annual cost standpoint. Plus the fact, you can haul an equivalent capacity for much lower capital costs, and annual costs—maintenance costs in particular.

That is something that never gets addressed by any of the transportation community in this country, and that is because everything is completely locked into roads and highways. That, of course, goes back to the Federal funding policies that developed in this country after World War II.

EIR: The National Defense Highway Construction Act?

Cooper: That hasn't changed.

EIR: Well, since, as Amtrak shows, rail is at an end, as far as the way things have been financed; and the airlines, as United Airlines shows; and the highways in Texas, with all the traffic on them, are all falling apart, we have a new opportunity.

Cooper: Right.