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COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–0907

October 8, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary, Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I would like to thank you for your work on, and support of, high speed rail. As you know, Florida is a large state with population centers spread throughout the state. Approximately 71 million people visit Florida each year and resident population is expected to grow significantly in the next 20 years. Dispersed population centers make getting around the state difficult, and increased growth will only further the problem as existing available modes of transportation become strained. It is for these reasons that high speed rail holds tremendous promise in Florida

I am a strong supporter of high speed rail. High speed rail is both efficient and reliable, will travel at much greater speeds than automobiles, will decrease pollution, and will not have congestion issues. Not only will high speed rail generate construction jobs, it will prompt overall economic growth in entire regions.

Florida has applied for high speed rail funding for two corridors: Tampa to Orlando and Orlando to Miami. The Tampa to Orlando segment could provide a very quick start for the federal government's high speed rail funding, since the right-of-way and environmental work is already completed. Construction on the Tampa to Orlando segment could begin as early as 2011.

The Tampa to Orlando high speed rail segment would include five station stops. These stops include downtown Tampa, Lakeland, Celebration, the Convention Center, and Orlando International Airport. The tracks would be in the median of Interstate 4. With the requested $2.654 billion in federal funding, service could be implemented as early as 2014. The overall cost would be approximately $3.227 billion. The second phase of the project is building high speed rail between Orlando and Miami. The overall cost of this segment is $10.07 billion.

In addition to these two projects, the state has applied for high speed rail funding for two other projects: the Florida East Coast (FEC) Amtrak service and Central Florida Commuter Rail. The FEC Amtrak service project would establish service between New York and Miami by traveling along Florida's east coast. Eight new stations would be constructed: St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Titusville, Cocoa, Melbourne, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart. Two trains will travel per day in each direction. Central Florida Commuter Rail is a light rail project, and federal funds would be used to purchase a 61-mile multi-purpose rail corridor from Deland to Poinciana in Central Florida to further work on this important commuter rail system.

Florida has been working on a high speed rail system for decades and is the most "shovel ready" project in the nation. High speed rail would decrease the time it takes to travel around the state, making it easier to attract businesses and further develop Florida's role in international trade. High speed rail will be useful to everyone including commuters, tourists, and residents. Tourists will especially see great benefits as much more of Florida will be accessible without an automobile.

I look forward to the day when people can travel to and from the major city and university centers in Florida in an hour or two, without having to suffer through long road trips or the vagaries, hassles, and costs of airline travel. A high speed rail corridor would benefit the entire state and provide relief to travelers who are tired of standing in long airport lines or getting stuck in traffic jams.

I strongly support the State of Florida's application for high speed rail funds, and I urge you to fully fund these important projects. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you in the future to increase funding for high speed rail around the nation.

Sincerely,

George S. LeMieux
United States Senator