

## CONFERENCE SPONSORS' PERSPECTIVES: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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EPA is delighted to co-sponsor this conference, even though it may seem, at first glance, that the future of intercity passenger trains is a little outside our area of interest. Believe me, it isn't. The future of passenger trains is critically important to the future of our national transportation system, which in turn is critically important to air quality, which in turn is critically important to human health. Thus the linkage between passenger trains and EPA is direct and clear. We can't achieve our goals unless you achieve yours.

EPA's interest in passenger trains is relatively recent, to be sure. For the first 20 years of EPA's existence, our main transportation-related responsibility was controlling the pollution emitted by cars. The American people insisted on those controls, because they knew that cars were a primary source of the air pollution choking most American cities. The catalytic converters worked well, and today a new car emits less than ten percent of the air pollution emitted by a new car in 1970.

But our urban air pollution problems haven't gone away, and cars are still the single biggest cause. Why? Because more people are driving more cars more miles than ever before. Even as we made cleaner and cleaner cars, we poured more and more miles of concrete for highways that made room for more and more cars. As a result, end-of-pipe controls on cars have not resulted in all the health benefits once expected. Almost 60 million Americans still live in areas with unhealthy air.

Bad air isn't the only environmental problem linked to car-dependent transportation systems. Our ever-expanding highways are carving up neighborhoods, destroying wetlands, and contributing to water quality problems and flooding. And in many cases they appear to be self-defeating. Though new highways were meant to move people and goods more quickly, congestion on those highways in fact slowed things down. The faster we poured the concrete, the slower we moved. Today the economic losses associated with highway congestion—the lost time, the wasted gas, the wear and tear on cars—may be as high as 80 billion dollars a year.

President Clinton likes to talk about the bridge to the future. As Americans approach the bridge to the 21st

century, we're finding that it's clogged with cars. If everyone tries to get over that bridge in a single-occupant vehicle, some people aren't going to reach the 21st century until some time in the 22nd.

What our modern transportation system really needs is alternatives. If we want to travel quickly, if we want to move people and goods efficiently, and if we want to breathe clean air and protect ecosystems at the same time, then we have to give people choices. People don't like to sit stranded in traffic jams while they suffer asthma attacks. If other options are available, people will take them. It's the responsibility of everyone here today, including those of us from EPA, to make sure that options are built into the nation's transportation system.

Intercity passenger rail is one of those options. And in high-density areas like the northeast corridor, intercity passenger rail may be the single most important option. The system is already in place, so we usually don't have to worry about the environmental costs of expansion. Increased use of the system can help reduce region-wide air pollution, and thus provide near-term health benefits. By getting some people out of their cars, passenger trains also can provide a big benefit for highway traffic by reducing congestion. Since railway stations, particularly the older ones, are often located in older urban centers, increased passenger traffic can help resuscitate the economies of cities. Intercity passenger trains are another example of how thoughtful, well-planned economic development can be a boon to environmental quality.

This kind of thinking is built into the Administration's position on NEXTEA. We want to see more money available for transportation options other than highways, options that help improve air quality while they reduce congestion. We support retention of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program, with an increased budget. If fully funded, CMAQ could reduce air pollution by more than a million tons a year by the year 2005. The Administration's NEXTEA proposal also would allow states and local areas to use federal funding for Amtrak, if that's seen as a transportation priority.

Like the rest of you, EPA loves passenger trains and the benefits they bring to travelers and the environment. I hope to see a lot of train traffic on that bridge to the future. Thank you.