

**(Cleveland: the heart of a new rail system)**

## **THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR PASSENGER RAIL IN OHIO**

**by James E. Seney**

Call it audacious or bold, but efforts to establish Cleveland as a major hub in a national high-speed rail system may be Ohio's best opportunity to become a fierce competitor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's global economy.

Some would suggest that this mode of transportation was essentially put out of business fifty years ago by interstate highways and air travel. These skeptics haven't been watching carefully enough as our roads have become clogged and conditions at many of our airports have become even worse. They have been quick to point to Amtrak's ongoing financial struggles, but they have not seen what many others have documented: that the prospects for a serious national investment in passenger rail may be brighter than ever. They also have failed to understand that for states like Ohio, a national high-speed rail system may be the key to success in our emerging global economy.

Ohio is the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy. This says a lot about what we have created in the Buckeye state – and about the economic opportunities that are available to our citizens.

What it doesn't tell us is that Ohio is struggling to maintain, and possibly improve, that position. Our challenge is defined, in part, by the resources and advantages we lack in comparison to our competitors. Consider that nearly all of the world's great urban economies (London, Paris, Toronto, Chicago and many others) are built around an international air transportation hub that connects them to markets around the globe and positions them as an international gateway.

Ohio's best prospect for a major international air hub is Cleveland Hopkins Airport, which already has international flights. Yet, Ohio's best opportunity for becoming truly an international gateway is to establish Cleveland as a major hub in a national high-speed rail system. This would permit Ohio, with its collection of urban and rural economies, to link itself to international air hubs in Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Toronto. And it should reinforce our efforts to boast Cleveland Hopkins' status as a full-fledged international air hub.

This is precisely what the Ohio Rail Development Commission is trying to do today. By securing Cleveland's designation as a major rail hub, Ohio would fill a large hole in a rail network for the nation's most heavily populated areas. But more importantly, the Cleveland Hub initiative would connect Ohio to a number of international air hubs. It would give us many of the benefits enjoyed by international gateways.

It would also give Columbus the opportunity to join Cleveland and Cincinnati. Toledo, Dayton, Akron and Youngstown would benefit by their location within these corridors.

Efforts to establish Cleveland as a major rail transportation hub take advantage of the three-hour travel window that exists in the transportation corridors, allowing these international gateways to exploit the frequency, pricing, and reach of each air hub by providing them the advantage of becoming interchangeable with one another. The “spokes” of this system also serve the intrastate and intercity business traveler, gaining advantage of global and regional markets, as well as increasing the capacity of the transportation corridors linking the major urban economies of the Great Lakes region. The collective capacity generated by multi-modal linkage of these international gateways creates one of the most versatile global transportation regions in the world.

This vision of a modern passenger rail system extends the reach of economically powerful international air hubs deep into Ohio, while improving the efficiency of our interstate transportation corridors.

But just “seeing” this vision won’t get us where we need to go. Ohio must take the steps and make the investments needed to position at least one of its major cities, and potentially more, as an equal with other major global urban economies of the Great Lakes region. We must build our capacity to serve as a world-class location for multinational and regional enterprises.

To grasp the advantages of global access, just think about the BP Oil and Boeing aircraft relocations to Chicago. This is why the Cleveland rail transportation hub is so important to Ohio’s future.

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