

France's SNCF hopes to run high speed rail in US

March 20 2009, by Mira Oberman



A French high-speed TGV train is pictured at the eastern French railway station of Bezannes. The United States is ready for a truly high-speed rail system and France's national railway SNCF would be "very interested" in operating a network, a senior executive said Thursday.

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"We strongly believe that in this country, in some of the corridors, the system should logically be profitable," [SNCF](#) International chairman Jean-Pierre Loubinoux said in an interview on the sidelines of a rail conference in Indiana.

While detailed market analysis still needs to be undertaken, Loubinoux

said the French experience has shown that high-speed rail operates most effectively between large cities that are around 1,000 to 1,500 kilometers (600 to 930 miles) apart.

These conditions exist in the east coast, California, the midwest, Texas and Florida.

"You could have more than just a corridor. You could have a system," he told AFP.

"If the possibility (of operating a network) is open we certainly would consider it with great interest."

The [US government](#) has allocated eight billion dollars for high-speed rail as part of a massive economic stimulus package and a number of states are competing for the money.

The bulk of the states are expected to propose incremental improvements to their rail systems by improving existing tracks in order to increase speeds from a maximum of 79 miles per hour to 110 or 150 miles per hour (127 kilometers per hour to 177 or 241 kilometers per hour.)

Loubinoux said the nation would be better off investing in a new, dedicated system with speeds of up to 217 miles (350 kilometers) per hour.

There is "a lot of business potential to be considered," Loubinoux said, adding that the structure of the bidding process remains to be determined.

"Will it be just a build and transfer of technology, will it be maintenance and operation... commercial contracts, operating possibilities," he said.

"Definitely in some cases, especially in high-speed corridors... we could envisage participating in some operation systems."

The SNCF, which developed France's famed TGV series of high-speed trains in the 1970s, plans to submit proposals to the US railway authority, which expressed interest last fall in improving service in 11 rail corridors.

"What we can bring is our experience. It's been more than 25 years since we developed high-speed rail services."

Loubinoux is hopeful that the United States, which has long lagged in developing its passenger rail system, now has the political will to launch the massive investment needed.

"The economic and financial crisis worldwide seems to be a sort of catalyst to big, nationwide infrastructure programs," he added.

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