

Obama vows to fast track high speed rail

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A TGV train, the French high speed train, in southern France. US President Barack Obama on Thursday highlighted a multi-billion dollar effort to develop high-speed US railway services, vowing to catch up with France, Japan, Spain and China.

US President Barack Obama Thursday called for a US high speed rail service to rival the express trains of France, Japan, Spain and China, highlighting a 13 billion dollar government funding boost.

"Imagine whisking through towns at speeds over 100 miles an hour, walking only a few steps to public transportation, and ending up just blocks from your destination," Obama said before leaving on a trip to Mexico and Trinidad.

"It is being done -- it is just not being done here," said Obama, mentioning rapid train services in France, Spain, China and Japan.

"There is no reason why we can't do this -- this is America. There is no reason why the future of travel should lie somewhere else beyond our borders.

"My [high-speed rail](#) proposal will lead to innovations that change the way we travel in America," Obama said at an event with Vice President Joe Biden, a former rail commuter whom he described as "America's number one rail fan."

"We must start developing clean, energy-efficient transportation that will define our regions for centuries to come," Obama said, touting at least 13 billion dollars for high-speed rail in his 787 billion dollar economic recovery plan and future federal budgets.

"High-speed rail is long overdue, and this plan lets American travelers know that they are not doomed to a future of long lines at the airports or jammed cars on the highways," Obama said.

Obama's strategy envisions 10 high speed rail corridors, including in California, Pacific Northwestern states, the Southern United States, the Gulf Coast and Florida.

He is billing it as an environmentally friendly effort which will not only ease transit gridlock but create jobs amid the worst economic slump in decades.

Eight billion dollars are provided for high-speed rail links under the stimulus plan as well as one billion dollars a year for five years in the federal budget as a "downpayment" on a new service.

Biden, who as a senator used to commute daily between his home state of Delaware and Washington aboard Amtrak services, argued that railways were not a relic of the past but instead the transport of the

future.

"It is about time we took those railways and made them the national treasures they should be," Biden said.

"They are the best way to reconnect and connect communities to each other, to move us all forward in the 21st century."

US railways, which once blazed a trail to America's 19th Century westward continental expansion, are now plagued by underinvestment and many services have fallen prey to market forces, with flying the preferred mode of travel.

As well as new high-speed rail corridors, Obama's plan also aims to make travel on existing railways faster, in a bid to speed countrywide travel and ease the environmental damage of road and air transit.

Among the new corridors are future links between the San Francisco area and Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego.

A route based in New England would link Boston, Montreal in Canada, Portland, Springfield, New Haven and Albany, while the plan foresees a new rail hub network in Chicago linking midwest cities including Milwaukee, St. Louis, Kansas City Detroit and Indianapolis.

The US government expects to start making grants under the plan to the states later this year.

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