The Multi-State Coalition Efforts to Make the I-20 Corridor Long-Distance Passenger Rail Connection a Reality

Presentation to the Rail Passengers Association RailNation Conference by Judge Richard Anderson & Christina Anderson I-20 Corridor Council October 22, 2022
On behalf of the I-20 Corridor Council, we appreciate the Rail Passengers Association’s invitation to make this presentation at the RailNation conference today.

We also appreciate the excellent work that the RPA leadership and membership continue to do to advance the expansion and improvement of passenger rail and Amtrak’s National Network throughout the United States.
Proposed I-20 Corridor Long-Distance Train between Dallas/Fort Worth and Atlanta (connecting with the East Coast and New York City)

With the passage of the bi-partisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021, we believe THE TIME IS NOW to make this important I-20 Corridor passenger rail route a reality.
By “connecting the dots” on this route between Marshall, Texas to Meridian, Mississippi on existing track, through northern Louisiana, we create an East-West passenger rail connection across the South, connecting to the East Coast and New York City.

This route would provide Amtrak service for northern Louisiana, which currently has no passenger rail service.
The I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail route would connect two of America’s fastest-growing mega-regions including greater Dallas/Fort Worth (7.5 million in population) and greater Atlanta (6 million), plus other cities and communities in between.
So, why, at this point in time, are we in a favorable position of readiness to help push this important I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail connection “over the goal line” and make it a reality?

Strong grassroots, multi-state coalition of support built and sustained over many years

Feasibility and Capacity studies of the route already completed, with funding obtained by I-20 Corridor Council

Passage of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), including $66 billion for rail

Merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern currently underway
One reason we’re in a favorable position is that, over the past 15 years, we’ve built a strong, grassroots, collaborative, multi-state coalition of support for this rail route in Texas and Louisiana, as well as in Mississippi and reaching out to Georgia and Alabama—including mayors, judges, councils of governments, local, state, and federal officials, business and economic leaders, university and college presidents, and many other stakeholders along the route.

The I-20 Corridor Council, in East Texas, initiated and took the lead on the current multi-state efforts in support of this route in November 2006.

We also appreciate the bi-partisan support of Texas Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, Louisiana Secretary of Transportation Shawn Wilson, and Mississippi Senator Roger Wicker.
Throughout the many years of this process, it’s been a parallel strategy of reaching out to and working with our colleagues to our East and West to build and sustain a strong multi-state coalition in support for this passenger rail connection and continually working to determine what will make the route economically viable, determine the cost on existing track, and determine that it won’t impede freight traffic.

Between North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) and East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) Signed: August 7, 2007 in Mineola

Between NCTCOG, ETCOG, Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments Signed: May 10, 2008 in Marshall, Texas

Between NCTCOG, ETCOG, Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments, North Delta (Northeast Louisiana) Council of Governments Signed: May 9, 2009 in Marshall
In early 2014, members of the Corridor Council reached out to our colleagues in Mississippi with the Central Mississippi Planning & Development District and the East Central Planning & Development District, as well as to the Southern Rail Commission chaired, at that time, by Mayor Knox Ross of Pelahatchie, Mississippi, to request a Resolution of Support for the Corridor Council’s rail studies of the I-20 passenger rail route.
RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION

To urge and request the Mississippi Legislature and the Mississippi Department of Transportation to ensure that the Central Mississippi Planning & Development District and the East Central Planning & Development District join with their respective Councils of Government in Texas and Louisiana, and are included in the ongoing Interstate 20 regional passenger rail corridor studies being conducted by the Ark-La-Tex Corridor Council [hereinafter the “Council” but formerly the “East Texas Corridor Council”] as well as the study being conducted by the State of Louisiana. The purpose of these feasibility studies will be to re-establish regional passenger rail from Dallas/Fort Worth Texas to Meridian, Mississippi, so as to provide transportation alternatives for the residents of the respective states.

WHEREAS, the Council is presently concluding a feasibility study commenced in 2012 [the “Texas Study”] on securing regional passenger rail [70-110 mph] for the Interstate 20 Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Study includes the feasibility of daily Amtrak routes between Dallas/Fort Worth and Bossier City and Shreveport, as well as funding possibilities to include a public-private partnership with annual contributions made by the states of Louisiana and Texas; and

Resolution signed on March 7, 2014
Another reason the I-20 Corridor rail route is in a favorable position of readiness at this time is that we already have two critical studies of the Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi portion of the route completed.

The Corridor Council obtained, a number of years ago, $738,000 in federal funding for the feasibility and capacity studies of this route, with the assistance of then-Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas.

The Corridor Council was able to steward the capacity study so that it studied, not just the Texas portion of the route, which the funding had originally been designated to cover, but instead the entire Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi portion of the route, at no cost to Louisiana or Mississippi.

The feasibility study, completed in 2015, determined that the I-20 Corridor long-distance route is economically viable, on existing track, without an ongoing annual expense.

The capacity study, completed in 2017, reflects that, for comparatively modest expenditure of some $80 million, additional siding could be installed so as not to impair the movement of freight.

Amtrak has stated that this study is in the process of being updated, to establish updated cost estimates for the route.
On November 15, 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law, providing a much-needed and unprecedented amount of funding for passenger rail.

With the assistance of Dallas Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, representatives from the I-20 Corridor Council met with Amtrak President Stephen Gardner on August 23, 2021.

Rep. Johnson, at Mr. Gardner’s request, wrote a letter to Surface Transportation Board Chairman Martin Oberman to urge that CP/KCS negotiations provide for passenger rail service on the I-20 Corridor route.
Correspondence between Texas Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson and Amtrak President Stephen Gardner and STB Chairman Martin Oberman from July 2021-November 2021.
With the assistance of members of the multi-state coalition, we obtained current and updated resolutions and letters of support representing more than 150 cities, counties, parishes, and other stakeholder entities along the I-20 route from Dallas/Fort Worth to the Mississippi border, sharing their support for the Canadian Pacific/KCS merger.

On April 28, 2022, the I-20 Corridor Council submitted a pleading and these resolutions of support from Texas and Louisiana to the STB.

Chairman Knox Ross and the Southern Rail Commission also obtained resolutions of support from Mississippi and submitted their resolutions of support to Canadian Pacific.
The COG maps shown below—going west to east from Dallas/Fort Worth through East Texas and northern Louisiana to the Mississippi border—show the counties and parishes represented in the initial I-20 Corridor MOUs and the re-committed resolutions of support from them in the pleading submitted to the STB by the Corridor Council on April 28, 2022.
The I-20 Corridor Council appreciates very much the resolution of support that the SRC signed in 2014 for the I-20 Corridor rail project. We also appreciate the outstanding and effective work that the SRC has done over the past many years in support of the restoration of the Gulf Coast route and their work with and strong support of MS Senator Roger Wicker.

On February 23, 2022, SRC Chairman Knox Ross and Amtrak representatives came to Bossier City to meet with some of the members of the Louisiana portion of the I-20 Corridor coalition and said that you would join us to assist with the ongoing I-20 Corridor efforts.

We welcome and appreciate their support and collaboration.
The Corridor Council appreciates the invitation to the meeting with Senator Bill Cassidy at the Coordinating and Development Corporation office in Bossier City on August 30, 2022.

We appreciate very much Senator Cassidy’s strong leadership with regard to the IIJA, his strong support for the I-20 Corridor passenger rail project, and his proactive steps to expedite the project.
This letter shared TXDOT’s request for consideration of several projects through the Corridor Identification Program, including:

New service east of Marshall, TX connecting Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station in Dallas to the Meridian, Mississippi Union Station

The federal, state, COG, and local officials with whom we've been collaborating in Texas these many years on this route, including Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, have been instrumental in the discussions with TXDOT and have been effective in getting this prioritized with TXDOT.
Any questions?
We believe the time is now to make the I-20 Corridor long-distance passenger rail route between Dallas/Fort Worth and Atlanta a reality.

Thank you for your support for this important transportation connection that will expand Amtrak’s National Network, improve connectivity, and benefit our I-20 Corridor communities, states, Southern region, and nation.