

## **Not your granddad's choo-choo**

Study finds high-speed rail would bring big economic benefits

By [ERIC ANDERSON](#) BUSINESS EDITOR

**Click byline for more stories by writer.**

First published: Monday, June 14, 2010

ALBANY -- A new study sponsored by rail equipment manufacturer Siemens AG finds that while incremental improvements to the state's passenger rail system would have modest economic benefits, the rewards from true high-speed rail, with trains traveling up to 220 mph, would be significant.

The study, for release today, found that ridership by 2035 would be twice as high on routes out of Albany than it would be if no improvements were made, as travel times were shortened and frequency of service increased.

Intercity car trips could be reduced by 22 percent from Albany, the study predicted, while short-haul airline trips would be reduced by 36 percent.

Carbon emissions on intercity car trips out of Albany would be reduced by 27 percent, the study predicted.

The report was released as state and industry officials were gathering today for a daylong conference on high-speed rail in New York state that is being held at the Albany Nanotech complex on Fuller Road in Albany.

Steve Fitzroy, director of operations for Economic Development Research Group Inc., said the economic models used to reach these conclusions are in wide use.

"We're using exactly the same kind of economic analysis used in projects all over the country," he said in a phone interview late last week.

Albany was one of four cities nationwide that were examined in the study for the United States Conference of Mayors.

Also examined were Los Angeles, Orlando and Chicago, all of which have active high-speed rail efforts under way.

"Albany is not only a potential hub, but it's right at the edge of a major metro area," said Fitzroy, referring to the city's proximity to New York City.

High-speed rail is generally regarded as having the greatest advantage over other transportation modes on trips of up to three hours, or distances up to 500 miles.

For Albany, that would include such cities as Cleveland, Washington and Toronto, as well as Boston, Buffalo and Montreal.

Oliver Hauck, president of the Mobility Division of Siemens Industry Inc., said the technology already exists. His company makes not only the propulsion systems and rail cars that now travel at

220 mph, but also the signaling and control systems that enable high-speed operations.

And he said it is not only possible to mix freight, medium-speed and high-speed passenger traffic in the same corridor, but that it's already being done on railroads in Germany.

CSX Transportation has balked at passenger trains exceeding 90 mph on its busy corridor across upstate New York, citing safety concerns.

Upgrading existing corridors would be less expensive than acquiring new rights of way, although dedicated passenger rail corridors would ease safety and congestion concerns from freight railroads, which own most of the track over which Amtrak currently operates and are experiencing their own issues with too much rail traffic.

Where high-speed rail is in place, it generally is competitive with air service.

In the Northeast Corridor, Amtrak has captured the largest share of the market, despite speeds that for much of the route are below 150 mph.

"Our line that we built from Madrid to Barcelona, within two years it took 50 percent of the air traffic onto rail," Hauck said.

And high-speed rail is evolving into one component of an intermodal transportation system.

"High-speed rail should not leave out any opportunity to connect directly to the airports," Hauck said.

In Florida, which Hauck said is furthest along of the four states the study examined, the rail line from Tampa will go directly to Orlando International Airport.

In upstate New York, the current Empire Corridor used by Amtrak goes within two miles of Albany International Airport and passes even closer to Buffalo International Airport. But there are apparently no plans to connect the trains and planes.

Indeed, there isn't even an expressway link from the Adirondack Northway to the Albany's airport terminal, despite years of effort by airport and local officials to get the long-planned connector built.

Another issue: How do passengers get around once they arrive at their destination? While New York City, Boston and Montreal have well-developed public transport systems, getting around without a car can be a challenge in most upstate cities.

Siemens, Hauck noted, also manufactures equipment for the light-rail market.

"The reintroduction of light rail started from the West Coast -- Edmonton, Calgary, San Diego" and is moving east, he said. Denver, Salt Lake City, Houston and Charlotte are among cities using or building light rail. Buffalo also has a light-rail system, although it hasn't been as widely embraced as other systems.

Finally, there's the question of money for a high-speed rail network. Given financial constraints governments face, incremental improvements to existing corridors will come first.

Siemens is bidding on a contract for new Amtrak locomotives that will replace ones currently in

service. Their top speed? 120 to 150 mph, Hauck said.

Reach Anderson at 454-5323 or by e-mail at eanderson@timesunion.com

The attraction of speed

Chart shows the estimated number of one-way trips that would be made annually in 2035 under three different scenarios.

Albany to 79/90 mph 110 mph 220 mph

Boston 270,000 315,300 589,300

Buffalo 280,800 329,500 623,400

Montreal 156,000 167,900 324,000

New York City 1,152,300 1,291,800 2,252,200

SOURCE: Economic Development Research Group, Inc.