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Administration Pitches Big Rail Projects

By MICHAEL COOPER

The Obama administration, whose efforts to bring [high-speed rail](#) to the United States were sidetracked by Republican governors in a couple of states, pressed ahead with its vision of building a national rail network on Tuesday when it called for spending \$53 billion on passenger trains and high-speed rail projects over the next six years.

The proposal, made by Vice President [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, would move the country closer to the president's goal of making high-speed rail accessible to 80 percent of Americans within 25 years.

But it comes as [President Obama's](#) efforts to bring bullet trains to America have gone from the "Yes We Can" optimism of his campaign slogan to the less certain "I think I can, I think I can" of a certain storybook train engine. Newly elected Republican governors have halted new rail projects, and a new Republican majority in the House has questioned the administration's rail strategy.

Many rail proponents cheered the proposal, especially the idea of making rail a regular part of the nation's transportation program so that long-term projects could be planned without uncertainty over whether money would be available later.

Mr. Biden cast it as an investment in the future. "As a longtime [Amtrak](#) rider and advocate," he said, "I

understand the need to invest in a modern rail system that will help connect communities, reduce congestion and create quality, skilled manufacturing jobs that cannot be outsourced.”

But Republicans were wary. They have questioned the projects the administration selected for the \$10.5 billion in rail money that has been approved so far, noting that much of it was spread around to conventional train service and questioning the suitability of the two true high-speed projects that are included: a relatively short 84-mile line in Florida connecting Tampa and Orlando, and a stretch along the California Central Valley that would eventually be part of a line from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Representative John L. Mica, Republican of Florida and chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, expressed “extreme reservations” about the proposal. “This is like giving Bernie Madoff another chance at handling your investment portfolio,” he said in a statement.

Mr. Mica favors high-speed rail but would prefer to direct the money to the corridor that links Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. “Rather than focusing on the Northeast Corridor, the most congested corridor in the nation and the only corridor owned by the federal government, the administration continues to squander limited taxpayer dollars on marginal projects,” he said.



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