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Editorial

America's Not-So-Fast Trains

President Obama noted the other day that high-speed rail is not some pie-in-the-sky idea. "It's happening now," he said. "The problem is that it is happening elsewhere." Japan, Spain, China and Germany are among those with superspeedy trains that rival air travel and easily eclipse the irritations of a car trip. Yet America has only one high-speed corridor, from Boston to Washington, where the Acela Express is often forced by conditions to slow down to average speeds of around 70 miles per hour.

Europe's bullet trains can run at an average of about 130 m.p.h., and Japan's zip through the countryside at an average of 180 m.p.h. One difference, of course, is that governments overseas have put big money behind these forms of transit. Spain, for example, plans to invest about \$140 billion over the next decade to develop a network of 6,200 miles of high-speed rail lines.

Mr. Obama made certain that he had some money in his first stimulus package for high-speed rail, but it was only about \$8 billion for the entire country. The House appeared ready to help, authorizing another \$4 billion, but the Senate recently decided to pare that amount down to a paltry \$1.2 billion. Senators Charles Schumer of New York and Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, who know how much railroads relieve congestion and pollution, should turn their colleagues around.

It's not as if high-speed rail is a dream only for the East and West Coasts. When the

Department of Transportation asked for proposals for using the president's stimulus money, an astonishing 278 plans arrived from 40 states and the District of Columbia.

There are big needs — like money in New York City for the Moynihan Station and funds for the corridor between Los Angeles and San Francisco. But there are many smaller communities that dream about high-speed rail as well. Florida's Tampa to Orlando corridor was the subject of one proposal. Another was for a fast train from Portland to Eugene, Ore. The total number of requests would cost about \$100 billion.

Despite his support of the idea of high-speed rail, President Obama has put off dealing with the national transportation bill for another 18 months. That is a delayed opportunity to move forward on an important new national transportation plan to expand public transit in much the way the Federal-Aid Highway Act did for roads more than 50 years ago.

Until Mr. Obama and members of Congress can enact a comprehensive new transit agenda, both have an obligation to make a down payment on high-speed-rail corridors across the nation.

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