

## High-Speed Rail can Keep the Economy on Track

*Michael Kehs (Hill & Knowlton)*

America's transportation systems are increasingly overburdened. America is falling behind Europe and Asia in developing new systems that exploit technological innovation. America needs jobs. As one of the key public affairs firms leading the nationwide high-speed rail public outreach effort, Hill & Knowlton, is well aware of these challenges, and has a strong working relationship with the US High Speed Rail Association (US HSR) ([www.ushsr.com](http://www.ushsr.com)), the only association in America advocating a nationwide high-speed rail network by 2030. Hill & Knowlton is on the brink of unleashing a campaign that aims to bring high-speed rail (HSR) to the forefront of public discourse. The purpose of this article is to provide insight from one of the nation's leading public affairs firms on how transportation professionals can effectively educate the public on significant transportation issues. Transportation issues, in general, are traditionally "hot" topics among the public.

While politicians and policy-makers in Washington and statehouses across the country dither, America falls further behind in infrastructure development and job creation. Look no further than our friends in China who just committed to build 16,000 miles of HSR networks. US HSR President Andy Kunz's vision for the U.S. includes a 17,000-mile national HSR network built in phases and slated for completion by 2030. And there are some heavy hitters who agree with this level of commitment. Ray LaHood, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation said recently that high-speed rail will deliver a more efficient downtown-to-downtown mobility; spur economic development; bring manufacturing jobs to the U.S.; and move us to a cleaner, greener way of getting around.

Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation and Hill & Knowlton Vice Chairman Norm Mineta recently told an audience on Capitol Hill that an additional \$134 Billion to \$262 Billion must be spent per year through 2035 to rebuild and improve roads, rail systems and air transportation.

"We're going to have bridges collapse. We're going to have earthquakes. We need somebody to grab the issue and

As the nation continues to grapple with critical issues related to the economy and the environment, the prospect of a national HSR system presents a new way forward. The benefits are vast: America invests in its future. It creates jobs – to the tune of 160,000 construction jobs in California alone and more than 320,000 permanent jobs, according to a University of California, Irvine study titled, "Thinking Ahead: High-Speed Rail in Southern California." That's a message Sacramento needs to hear.

The benefits of a HSR system nationally, once established, will comprise the greatest change to the way Americans travel since the establishment of the interstate highway system. And as I said in June at the US HSR conference in Los Angeles, there's no better place to start than right here in California.

Our largest and most productive state in the union, California represents an opportunity to set a constructive pattern and model for the nation. As Californians and others are so fond of saying "as California goes, so goes the nation."

But we are not without our challenges. Like so many states, California finds itself in fiscal peril with many competing priorities vying for attention in Sacramento. But HSR presents a light at the end of the tunnel. With a \$2.25B down-payment from the federal government – to include the recent \$194M federal grant from the Federal Rail Administration that will help pay for preliminary engineering and environmental analyses of segments connecting San Francisco to Anaheim – we have the momentum behind us to make our case.

Despite these positive elements, there are still obstacles to the establishment of a national HSR system, not the least of which is the projected \$600 Billion cost. And we're still grappling with a political environment where short term fixes rule the day. So we are relying heavily on the transportation engineers and other experts to help explain to the public and our elected leaders why HSR – as a long-term vision and solution for a better tomorrow – is worth the effort and investment TODAY.

California's transportation engineers represent a critical voice for transformative change in America's transportation options. With your participation and leadership, we will look back to this moment and realize that this is where we turned the momentum.

run with it, whether it be in Congress or the White House," Mineta said. As a transportation engineer, nobody knows better than you when it comes to explaining how HSR can get the U.S. economy charging forward again. We need California's transportation engineers to be major players on the team, leading the charge in advocating for federal, state and private sector investment so you can build this essential piece of transportation infrastructure.

*About the Author: Michael Kehs is the General Manager of the Washington DC Office of Hill & Knowlton and head of US Public Affairs. He spoke at the US High Speed Rail Association Conference in June 2010 in Universal City at a lunchtime session on the topic "Media, Messaging, and Marketing." He can be reached at 202-944-5125 or [Michael.Kehs@hillandknowlton.com](mailto:Michael.Kehs@hillandknowlton.com).*

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