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Group wants to get West on fast track

S.L. Chamber hears report on creating high-speed rail lines

By **Laura Hancock**

Deseret News

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SALT LAKE CITY — It's called Interstate II, the concept of high-speed railroad ribboning through the United States.

For proponents of high-speed rail, the first round of interstate started with President Dwight D. Eisenhower and asphalt. Now that the freeways have been built, a second phase of transportation linking the states is necessary, or so the argument goes.

"One thing that differs us from Europe and from parts of the rest of the world is that over the next several decades, there will be 100 million more of us," said Bill Millar, president of the American Public Transit Association.

"We not only have to create an economy that will support that 100 million more people, but we have to do it at the same time we're trying to reduce our dependence on foreign oil sources."

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Parsons Behle & Latimer

Millar and a handful of transportation experts spoke about high-speed rail at the Salt Lake Chamber's Transportation Committee meeting on Thursday. The Utah Transit Authority is a member of a network called the Western High Speed Rail Alliance, with transportation agencies in Reno, Las Vegas, Denver and Phoenix. The idea is that the Western cities will connect into the national network via Denver, and to the planned high-speed rail line that will connect northern and southern California by 2020 via Las Vegas and Reno.

Except in existing railroad corridors in which Amtrak currently operates and is legally allowed to play an active role in expansion, most high-speed rail systems will likely be financed and operated by a combination of public and private groups. Some freight train companies have expressed interest in getting back into the passenger business.

High-speed lines can be profitable, a few of the experts said Thursday. But that's debatable: The libertarian Cato Institute published a policy analysis called

1 photo

High-speed rail

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high-speed rail in Japan and Europe, concluding they are subsidized by governments.

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David Carol, involved in high-speed rail at the construction and planning firm Parsons Brinckerhoff, said there's no reason for employees of the Delta Air Lines hub at Salt Lake City International Airport, for instance, to fear high-speed rail.

"The fact is we have the world's best highway system and the world's best air transportation system," Carol said. "And we will continue to need the world's best highway system and the world's best air transportation system."

The reality, Carol said, is that it won't be the solution to all transportation needs: high-speed rail is perfect for trips between cities 100 to 600 miles apart, while shorter and longer trips are better in cars or planes.

President Barack Obama may be to Interstate II what Eisenhower was to Interstate I, but more money needs to be committed. Thus far, the federal government has committed less than \$20 billion to states and regional networks — a fraction of the amount that supporters say will be necessary.

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