

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Andy Kunz, President & CEO, US High Speed Rail Association**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

**Andy Kunz:**

### **The allure of HSR**

There've been polls in America that showed 88% of Americans support it. And when you really probe deep into that, you realize that there's probably an equal percent of Americans who have never even been on a high-speed train. Yet they still support it because it sounds good, they see it on video, they see it in the movies, they're fed up with the airlines and how hard it is to get around by airplane or by car, and we don't have that third option. People think the Acela is high-speed, which it's not. If they're against it, they assume "Oh, well, Amtrak – that's a hundred years ago, falling apart. Why would we invest billions of dollars into more of the crummy rail system like we have?" There are all kinds of confusion and misinformation out there in terms of what this really is. But even given all that confusion and lack of true knowledge, there still is high support for this, without even a system built yet. So we're working really hard to get the Florida one under way, so that people can actually go see. And then we think that it will snowball from there, once there's one up and running. Right now, it's all a lot of talk. Word needs to get out because when you really share this with people they love it; they're excited. There are so many solutions that this offers, and the thing that's in the way is not enough common knowledge about this. Once you get the common knowledge and all the people are on board, then the politics and the money follow it. There's no question about that.

### **Doing nothing is not an option**

The real deal is that doing nothing is not an option. This is what's not really clear to a lot of people. A lot of people just say "Oh well you know, we're broke, we can't afford this rail system." Well, we cannot sit back and do nothing. Our transportation systems are crumbling before our eyes. The congestion is rising every day, and so we will have to spend hundreds of billions of dollars one way or another on our transportation, whether it's adding more lanes to the roads, repairing falling apart bridges, or adding more runways. We cannot sit back and do nothing. The nation is like a human body with hardening of the arteries. The patient is going to completely die if you do nothing. Our whole country will just stagnate into paralysis if we do nothing. Doing nothing is not an option. Once we're all in agreement about that, then you say: "Well, where can we spend transportation dollars that will do a number of things: that will return the most mobility, per dollar spent, that will build a transportation that will function in twenty

years from now, that won't just be more of the same? And then we run out of oil, or oil is \$300 dollars a barrel, and all of our existing systems fail, so investing more money in those is just investing more money in a system you know has no future.

### **High-speed rail is the only viable solution**

Nothing else even comes close to what high-speed rail can deliver. You can power it by renewable energy as you scale that up. You can't power 300 million cars on renewable energy, and you can't power all the airplanes on renewable energy; it's just not going to happen. And even if it did, if tomorrow you suddenly waved the magic wand and all 300 million cars in America were now hybrids or even 100% electric, they're still stuck in traffic and no one's going anywhere. So when you really dig deeper into this, this is what California finally concluded: high-speed rail is the only viable solution. California has said: "All right let's project forward," and you can do the same exercise in all fifty states, or any other country in the world. They projected forward. We're expecting the state to continue to grow in population by X million people, and they said "How are we going to have all these people move when our existing highways and airports are already at the breaking point, as it is today?" How are another 20 million people going to be able to move through the state of California? And they said: "Well, we have to double California's highway system, and we'd have to add something like six more airports." So let's just say, the big "IF:" if we had the money to do that, it would probably be \$300 billion dollars. That would be hurdle number one. Hurdle number two is, let's say you do have the money, there are cities right up to the barricades of the highway. You'd have to mow down millions of homes; it's just not feasible to double the California highway system. And there's nowhere to put more airports. No one wants an airport anywhere near them, and so the cost of doing those two things was going to be in excess of like \$300 billion dollars. So they said: "Well gosh, a state-wide HSR system covering every major city in California, is only \$40 billion. That's a bargain of the century compared to how much we have to spend doing the other two things." And if you did the other two things, they'd still be congested. You'd still be just as dependent on oil, and you'd still be putting out just as much pollution, destroying the biosphere in the process.

### **People need the facts to make the right decisions**

My idea is if you're really onto something important, and real, and true, and you're not trying to con somebody, then the best thing you can do is present the case to the people, and they will usually see the light, and they'll get on board. You have to educate the people the truth. You can't educate them all the BS that's out there about "Oh, well France, you know, is more dense," and "We can't do it; it won't work in this country." I'm talking about educating them the real truth, that our forefathers had enough insight to build our original rail system and enough foresight to build the interstate highway system, and the universities. Everyone does take all that for granted, but somebody, at some point, had

enough vision and persistence to get these things up and running, and then everyone else gets to come along and enjoy all the fruits of that. You've got to tell people the truth. The people need to know how serious our oil dependency is, how dangerous this dependency is if we don't do something about it. They need to know that. They need to know how serious climate change is, and the main cause of it is our burning of fossil fuels – which again goes right back to transportation. And they need to know the solutions. Here's solution A, B, C, D, and E. Here are the pros and cons of each. Now that you're armed with the proper information about how transportation actually gets funded – that it's people make decisions now, and then we inherit what they decided, and we'll be stuck with whatever they spend the money on for the next 30 years. These are all extremely important issues. I think everybody in America needs to be up to speed. They need to get the knowledge, and then they need to be armed with the true facts, and the truth, and then I believe they will make the right decision.

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