

## High-speed rail plans unveiled

By Steve Bandy, News Messenger

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Plans for the establishment of a high-speed rail service that would connect Marshall with points east, west and north were announced during a press conference Thursday afternoon at The Marshall.

Elected officials from Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, along with officials from the East Texas Corridor Council, Amtrack and the National Association of Railroad Passengers met to discuss and unveil plan for the South-Center High-Speed Rail Corridor.

A partnership with the East Texas Council of Governments, the North Louisiana Council of Governments and the North-Central Council of Governments links every county and parish between Fort Worth and Bossier, La., in the effort, according to Richard Anderson, Harrison County judge and chairman of the ETCC governmental relations committee. Ultimately, the rail line would extend from Marshall northward to Texarkana and Little Rock, eastward to Shreveport, and westward to Longview, Mineola, Dallas and Fort Worth.

"This is bottoms-up government," Anderson said. "We have local governments coming together to reach out and request participation from the state and federal governments. This is a regional effort — the Ark-La-Tex region."

Anderson stressed that this is not a short-term plan.

"This is a vision for the future. This could have a 15-year horizon," he said. "But the fact of the matter is, we have to come together as a region and share the vision and plan for the benefit of our children and our children's children. We've had one set of tracks out here between Dallas and Marshall for 130 years and now it's time to double it and now its time to make high-speed rail a possibility."

The plan is to establish a double-rail high-speed system along the right-of-way of the Union-Pacific tracks.

"The cost of double-tracking the South Central High-Speed Rail corridor is estimated to be \$250 million," Anderson said. "That's the cost of one flow-relief overpass on an interstate highway."

Anderson said the \$250 million price tag would produce 954 miles of double-tracking "from San Antonio to Austin to Fort Worth to Dallas to Marshall to Texarkana to Little Rock" with "a 30-mile stretch we're calling 'The Louisiana Leg' to take you from Marshall to Shreveport/Bossier." Trains would travel at speed of 105 to 115 along that rail line.

"This is truly a regional approach," said Shreveport City Council Calvin Lester. "Many times in government, cities and municipalities work very hard at competing against each other, we don't work very well together. This is one of those unique situations where it's in everyone's interest that we make this happen."

Lester, who was accompanied to the meeting by a representative of the Shreveport mayor's office, said the council there is in complete support of the project.

"We know that if this comes to fruition, it's going to be tremendous for the cities of Shreveport and Bossier, but it's also going to be tremendous for the region as we draw regionally and reach out to all areas," he said. "We are fully committed to doing whatever we can from the city of Shreveport's standpoint to make this come to reality, including

pressuring and lobbying our own state legislators and our Congressional delegation."

Representatives of U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., also attended the Thursday meeting. "I think it's very important for us to be able to work on all levels of government — federal government, state and county down to the municipal level — to try to make this project a reality," said Arkansas state Rep. Steve Harrelson, Majority Leader. "One of the things I think is important for legislators is to provide funding for planning and engineering to make sure that we can stay with the project until we can finally step on board and take a ride to Dallas and Texarkana."

Future plans are to extend the line to Meridian, Miss., where there is already a high-speed rail.

"All we're going to do is cross the northern tier of the state of Louisiana and that would provide conductivity all the way from Dallas/Fort Worth all the way to Atlanta and up to Washington (D.C.), New York and Boston," Anderson said. "Then, a 90-mile extension from Little Rock to Memphis would give our friends in Arkansas high-speed access to the East Coast without having to come down to Texas.

"With the issues that we have with respect to congestion on the highways, where we've got \$9 trillion in national debt, a half-trillion dollars in operating debt in the federal budget, we have got to learn that we need to address problems such as mass transportation on a regional or a national basis and this is the first step here in this region," Anderson concluded.

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