

Still in pursuit of high-speed rail for Texas

By RYAN RENFROW, News Messenger

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The importance of a high-speed rail system in Texas was touted during a meeting of the East Texas Corridor Council Wednesday at the Marshall Depot conference room.

"It sure would be nice to get on a train and have someone drive you to work." said State Rep. Bryan Hughes, who was the guest speaker at the meeting.

The council's purpose is to promote transportation avenues along Interstate Highway 20 including high-speed rail, a form of passenger train transportation that can travel between 125 and 200 mph, in order to curb overcrowding of the state's highways.

"We are promoting higher speed rail along the Interstate 20 corridor from Dallas/Fort Worth to Arkansas and Louisiana border connections," said Chairman Celia Boswell.

Hughes said, "The rails are important for everybody, generations not even here yet. When you look at how the population is growing, we can't get away from transportation issues and rail is part of the solution."

After visiting towns such as Boston and New York, Hughes said it was easy to use the passenger trains in those cities.

Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson expressed an urgency in publicizing the push for high speed rails.

"We are developing momentum in this effort. However, we have got to get others thinking outside the box," he said.

The council's efforts are progressing and on Aug. 7, more than 75 people of the East Texas and North Central Texas Region signed a joint memorandum of understanding announcing their belief in higher speed rail along the I20 corridor. Several of the signers were judges, transportation officials and rail advocates.

Amtrak's Texas Eagle train currently runs from Louisiana through Marshall and continues to Dallas and several parts of the country.

However, according to Griff Hubbard, president of the Gregg County Rail District, "The Texas Eagle is three hours behind schedule, and Amtrak has disconnected the Eagle from the national system." Being disconnected from the national means that there is an overnight layover when you arrive in a large city and wish to travel beyond it.

Even with the problems associated with the Texas Eagle, the council wants to continue the push for a high speed rail.

Mineola Community and Economic Development Director, Mercy Rushing said, "I want to make sure that passenger rail is as important in East Texas as it is in Boston and New York. I want to be able to live here and work in Dallas and future generations to have the same opportunities."

Contact Ryan Renfrow at rrenfrow@coxmmn.com or 903-927-5962