



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION JOINT PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Tuesday, January 26, 2010

Contact: Erica Fatima
(404) 631-1836

Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner Vance C. Smith, Jr., Hosts Southeast High-Speed Rail Transportation Summit

ATLANTA – In an historic move, key transportation leaders representing southeastern states unanimously voted to form the Southeast High Speed Rail Coalition. Georgia DOT Commissioner Vance C. Smith, Jr., who spearheaded the efforts, hosted the meeting at Georgia DOT headquarters to focus the attention on the need for high-speed rail connectivity. Not since the 1980's when the Northeast Corridor Committee was formed has there been such collaboration on the part of southern transportation leaders.

Representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee attended the summit which highlighted the group's commitment to accelerate the pace in which the southeast embraces high-speed, intercity rail connectivity as a critical component of their transportation plans.

Commissioner Smith said, "We are in a very unique position as a state, in that we are a connection thruway to so many neighboring states." He went on to state, "We understand with great clarity that Georgia must commit to high speed rail connectivity and this is an opportune time to do so."

The transportation leaders discussed at length various funding challenges each is facing, but were optimistic in recognizing that the current Federal Administration has directed available funding to states that have high speed rail plans.

"This is a seismic shift in the way this country looks at rail," stated Commissioner Sarah Nuckles, Fifth Congressional District member of the South Carolina Department of Transportation Commission. "Today this group took a momentous leap forward; by acting as a coalition we have acknowledged the importance rail has in our national future. This hails back to the significance rail had so many years ago."

The group laid out several primary objectives which included the development of a comprehensive vision and regional service plan. The goal of the Southeast High Speed Rail Coalition is to become an advocacy group for joint policy to advance high-speed rail corridors of significance. GDOT Intermodal Division Director Erik Steavens will form a joint technical task force as a first assignment to completing the objectives.

"This will take collaboration from all the states represented here, in addition to collectively engaging the business community," stated Patrick B. Simmons, Rail Division Director for North Carolina DOT. Georgia State Transportation Board members, Emory McClinton and Robert Brown agreed with that position. "A commitment from the business community and public private partnerships is essential to the success of high-speed rail in the southeast," Georgia STB member Dana Lemon stated. "Economic development throughout the southeast depends on the team effort of this group."

Summit attendees were: Don T. Arkle, P.E., Assistant Chief Engineer, Policy & Planning Alabama DOT; Craig Thomas, Rail Programs Manager Alabama DOT; J. Brian Atkins, Division Director Alabama Department of Economic Development; Brenda Jones, Alabama Department of Economic Development; Stephanie C. Kopelousos, Secretary Florida DOT; Nazih K. Haddad, Passenger Rail Development Manager Florida DOT; Georgia DOT State Transportation Board members, Robert Brown, Dana Lemon and Emory McClinton; Vance C. Smith, Jr., Commissioner Georgia DOT; Gerald Ross, Chief Engineer/Deputy Commissioner Georgia DOT; Erik Steavens, Intermodal Programs Director Georgia DOT; Todd Long, State Transportation Planning Director Georgia DOT; Gene Conti, Secretary North Carolina DOT; Patrick B. Simmons, Rail Division Director North Carolina DOT; Sarah B. Nuckles, Commissioner Fifth Congressional District South Carolina DOT; Glennith Johnson, Esq., Deputy Secretary for Mass Transit South Carolina DOT; Roy Tolson, Rail Program Manager South Carolina DOT; Gerald F. Nicely, Commissioner Tennessee DOT; Paula Shaw, Multimodal Division Director Tennessee DOT; Jeanne Stevens, Long Range Planning Director Tennessee DOT; Kevin Page, Chief of Rail Transportation Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation; Shayne Gill, Program Manager AASHTO Aviation Passenger Rail & Public transportation; David Ewing, Consultant States for Passenger Rail Coalition.

To learn more about the Southeast High Speed Rail Coalition visit <http://www.dot.ga.gov/localgovernment/intermodalprograms/> presentations and photos from the meeting are posted.

###