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## **MULTI-STATE PARTNERSHIP RELEASES STUDY ON HIGH SPEED RAIL OPTIONS** *Study Finds High Speed Rail Feasible in Charlotte-Macon Corridor*

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — Transportation officials from Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina have released a feasibility study that assesses the implementation of high speed passenger train service south between Charlotte, N.C., Greenville, S.C., Atlanta, Ga. and Macon, Ga. as an extension of the Washington, D.C. to Charlotte Southeast High Speed Rail corridor (SEHSR).

The United States Congress authorized a program of national high speed rail corridors in 1991. The SEHSR in Virginia and North Carolina was one of the five original corridors designated by the USDOT in 1992. In 1998, the USDOT extended the corridor into South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

The Charlotte-Macon Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor study assesses the capacity and speed capabilities of the corridor and estimates possible ridership, revenue, operating and capital costs associated with extending high-speed passenger rail from Charlotte, N.C. to Macon, Ga., along the I-85 corridor. The report also addresses the feasibility of train speeds up to 150 miles per hour, including new track construction in locations that would increase speeds and avoid congested areas. The study was conducted by the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center in Cambridge, Mass.

“This effort supports our shared belief that we must seriously consider -- and plan for -- transportation alternatives in these rapidly developing areas,” said Georgia Transportation Commissioner Gena Evans. “Given the growth our states continue to experience, we must explore every tool in our tool box in order to move the needle on transportation reform.”

South Carolina Transportation Secretary H.B. “Buck” Limehouse, Jr. noted: “This Southeast corridor is recognized as one of the top mega-regions of the nation. We absolutely must be planning ways to connect it with our neighbors to the northeast in energy-responsible ways. This analysis helps to better position ourselves for high speed rail should sufficient funding be appropriated.”

The Charlotte-Macon corridor study marks the next phase in the overall development of high-speed rail in the Southeast. The North Carolina Department of Transportation and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation began initial environmental work in the mid-1990s on the Washington-Charlotte portion of SEHSR.

“We’ve been working with Virginia on the SEHSR corridor for over a decade now and are pleased to see this initiative progress further,” said North Carolina Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippett. “We look forward to our continued partnership with Georgia and South Carolina to link these important centers of economic activity.”

The study builds upon a prior study in 2004 which assessed the feasibility of high speed rail service in this corridor at three relatively “lower” speeds: 79 mph, 90 mph, and 110 mph. It proposed using existing rail tracks for the most part with some modifications.

Both studies concluded that high speed rail passenger service in this corridor is feasible. State transportation officials from all three states agree the completed study lays the groundwork for more detailed analyses:

- ◆ New travel surveys that would obtain actual origin and destination data from travelers in the corridor.
- ◆ Second, more thorough ridership/revenue projections using the travel data and extending the model to the major markets in the north, including Washington DC, New York and Boston
- ◆ Finally, the two preceding efforts would feed into a Tier I Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which would begin the Federally-mandated EIS process conducted for a potential transportation infrastructure investment of this type. The Tier I EIS is a National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) document that establishes the overall project purpose, approach and corridor location and size.

High speed rail service, where appropriate, will provide business and leisure travelers with a competitive alternative to air and auto for trips between 100 and 500 miles.

Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia are working together with the business communities in each state to plan, develop and implement high speed rail in the Southeast. If implemented, the system would be developed incrementally, upgrading existing rail rights of way where possible. The complete Volpe Study can be viewed online at [www.sehsr.org](http://www.sehsr.org).

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