

\$50B in high-speed rail applications submitted

By JOAN LOWY (AP) – October 7, 2009

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration said Tuesday it has received applications from 24 states seeking \$50 billion for high-speed rail projects, more than six times the money designated in the economic stimulus plan.

A decision on which projects will receive funds will be made this winter, Joseph Szabo, head of the Federal Railroad Administration, said in a statement.

"Our selections will be merit-based and will reflect President Obama's vision to remake America's transportation landscape," Szabo said.

In August, the agency received 214 applications from 34 states totaling \$7 billion for corridor planning and smaller projects, which would include trains traveling less than 110 miles per hour, the rate defined as high-speed in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Applications for high-speed projects were due Oct. 2.

The \$787 billion recovery act designated \$8 billion for high-speed and other passenger rail projects. Interest in winning a share of the rail funds has been intense, not only by states, but by domestic and foreign rail, engineering and construction companies that want to build and operate the systems.

The fierce competition means most applicants are likely to go away empty-handed. The \$4.7 billion application from the California High-Speed Rail Authority alone totals more than half the available funds. California is aiming for bullet train service to eventually extend from Sacramento to San Diego.

Pennsylvania is seeking funds for several projects, including a magnetic levitation train that would run from Pittsburgh International Airport to downtown Pittsburgh. A maglev train is suspended on a magnetic cushion above a magnetized track and so travels free of friction. There are none in the U.S.

Florida is seeking \$2.5 billion for high-speed service between Tampa and Orlando. North Carolina transportation officials want to start work on a Southeast rail corridor between Charlotte and Richmond, Va. A slew of Midwest states have rail projects that aim to link to a regional system centered in Chicago.

Even states not normally associated with passenger rail have submitted applications. Oklahoma wants a high-speed line between Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Ohio is seeking funds to start up service connecting Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati.