

House Republicans Want Amtrak Out of Rail Corridor

House Republican leaders last week said they are drafting a bill that would take the nation's busiest rail corridor out of the hands of Amtrak.

At a hearing Thursday, House Transportation Committee Chairman John Mica, R-Fla., and Rail Subcommittee Chairman Bill Shuster, R-Pa., concluded that the 437-mile Northeast Corridor would be the ideal location to develop a U.S. high-speed rail system -- but not with Amtrak in control of most of it.

"We plan to introduce legislation to separate the Northeast Corridor from Amtrak, transfer it to a separate entity, and begin a competitive bidding process that would allow for a public-private partnership to design, build, operate, maintain and finance high-speed service," Mica said in a news release. "Our plan would do so in a dramatically shorter time, in closer to 10 rather than 30 years, and at a fraction of the \$117 billion cost proposed by Amtrak, while creating new jobs."

Congress created Amtrak with passage of the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970. The for-profit corporation has become a lightning rod for Republicans who oppose President Obama's \$53 billion plan to create a nationwide intercity high-speed rail network.

In September, Amtrak unveiled a \$117 billion, 30-year plan to create a "next-gen" high-speed rail system in the Northeast Corridor. Shuster isn't buying in.

"We've tried it Amtrak's way without success for nearly 40 years and it's time to go down a new path and inject private-sector competition," Shuster said in a news release. "It is time to deregulate America's passenger-rail system and the Northeast Corridor presents the best place to start with private investment and market-based ideas."

Pointing to statistics showing decreasing ridership levels in the corridor, Mica railed against Amtrak's "dismal record" and "lack of achievement in this incredibly valuable transportation corridor."

"Amtrak's plan to bring high-speed service to the NEC is unacceptable," Mica said. "We can attract private-sector resources and expertise and do it in less than half the time."