

---

**We Need a Simple Plan for a *North American* Transportation Network**  
*- An Open Letter to the American People and Our Neighbors in Canada and Mexico -*

I've worked in the transportation industry my entire adult life, from automotive, to the highway industry, to airlines and railroads. Last century, America was the envy of the world. President Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System, bolstered by cheap 29 cent gasoline and diesel, with a state and federal fuel tax per gallon funding the Highway Trust Fund, was one of the finest transportation systems and public works projects of the 20th century. But today we live in a new century and a new world. It is a world no longer suited for fierce competing singular modes of transportation. We now have radically repriced fuel, and that changes everything!

Our North American transportation infrastructure is now badly stressed, deteriorating, unsafe, congested and inefficient to meet our passenger, consumer and shipper demands. There are some bright signs in transportation, particularly in freight movement. It is evolving into a global interconnected "intermodal" transportation network. Today's expanded worldwide infrastructure is based not on four single competing modes, but on container-based inter-mode transport. International ships now efficiently carry 1000s of containers across the oceans to deep water ports, where cargo is transferred to rail cars for inland transport. A typical train can be 140 rail cars long, carry 280 containers double stacked, and travel economically for long distances on the surface.

Completing the intermodal partnership, trucks then dray the containers to destination. Typically, up to 100,000 pairs of khaki pants can make the entire trip for a very low transportation cost per pair. That is why we are able to buy good khaki pants at general stores for only \$10.00 per pair. The global shipping industry today is utilizing the strengths of each mode – especially the highly fuel efficient railroads – that can move a ton of khaki pants more than 400 miles on one gallon of fuel. The global transportation systems are working seamlessly in most parts of the world. Here in the United States, and the rest of North America, however, we have not yet adopted a seamless intermodal policy for freight and passengers.

Ironically, North America has in place (and paid for) a huge 240,000-mile "steel wheel on steel rail" Rights of Way (ROW) network that governments and private freight railroads have invested in for 150 years. This network connects all of our city centers and ports and runs past most airports. This huge rail system, which is currently operating at less than 20-25 percent capacity, can be grade-separated and doubled- and triple-tracked for increased capacity without damaging any more green fields.

On existing mainlines we can easily build at least 30,000 miles of “grade separated”, high-speed track. With today’s technology, such as GPS, Positive Train Control (PTC) and digital sensors, we could easily run 125-mph intercity passenger express trains and safely enable freight trains to travel at up to 90 mph, doubling the freight speeds and capacity we now have. In addition, the commuter airline system is shrinking and shippers are unable to fill up the big jumbo planes, while commuter planes use too many airport slots and too much jet fuel. Yet, high-speed passenger trains filled with the equivalent of a single jumbo airplane filled with goods can connect with all the city centers and major airports in North America. A similar system is already being used in Europe and Asia. Take the “train to the plane” is logical.

The Simple Plan (and a large public works program) to meet this century's transportation and economic challenges lies in building what I call North American *Interstate 2.0*, a holistic, high-speed, passenger and freight rail transportation system that is seamless in nature. It will require a working partnership between the federal and state DOT’s of the U.S., Canada and Mexico, both the freight railroads and the passenger rail segments. This kind of modern shared-use transportation system will generate tremendous economic vitality for North America by creating a large public works project with millions of jobs that cannot be outsourced. When completed, this project will provide a major asset for a more livable, very safe and sustainable North American transportation system that can be easily electrified by mid-century!

To pay for this new *Interstate 2.0* intermodal transportation system, the President and United States Congress should approve two new trust funds to replace the expiring Interstate Highway Trust Fund. A freight trust fund would be based on cents per freight mile movement; the passenger trust fund would be based on cents per passenger/vehicle miles used. Done wisely, this vision of a North American rail-based *Interstate 2.0* can be the new and modern transportation paradigm for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in place by 2030 to 2040.

---

*Gil Carmichael, a leading Southern Republican spokesperson on transportation issues, is Founding Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Intermodal Transportation Institute at the University of Denver, a former Federal Railroad Administrator, and former Chairman of the Amtrak Reform Council. Mr. Carmichael can be reached at: [gil@missouth.com](mailto:gil@missouth.com).*

**EDITORIAL CONTACTS:**

**Jim Martin** | [jim@jdmassociates.com](mailto:jim@jdmassociates.com)  
**Geoff Martin** | [geoff@jdmassociates.com](mailto:geoff@jdmassociates.com)  
JDM & Associates Marketing LLC  
847.570.9100

###