

Rail investment would bring economic benefits

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The recent jumps in Amtrak ridership on the rescheduled eastbound Lake Shore Limited train, which departs Cleveland at 7 a.m., should come as no surprise to anyone. It shows there is unmet demand for convenient train services.

It is sad that three of Cleveland's four daily trains serve the city mostly during the middle of the night. However, Amtrak is in discussions to get the westbound Lake Shore Limited rescheduled to depart Cleveland during daylight hours. This is encouraging, because Ohio deserves better from Amtrak.

Ohio also can do better for itself. The state should work with Amtrak, the freight railroads and the cities of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown and others to extend existing intercity passenger-rail services from New York, Michigan and Pennsylvania into Ohio.

This would be a logical starting point for implementing the proposed Ohio Hub plan, which will connect all of Ohio's major cities with fast, frequent passenger schedules on trains with speeds of up to 110 mph. The Ohio Hub also would address the state's critical need to increase its freight-transport capacity. The Ohio Hub would create more than 16,000 jobs and generate more than \$9 billion in economic development -- a solid return on investment.

Other states have invested in improved passenger-rail services, including California, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wisconsin. These states not only have seen jumps in train ridership as a result, but their investments also are being rewarded with economic development.

Investing in rail would help Ohio's economy, improve Ohio's energy security, enhance our quality of life, benefit the environment and provide a mobility option that would benefit everyone, especially business travelers, seniors, the disabled and discretionary travelers.

Furthermore, the recent collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis is a prime example of how we are expecting too much from our highway system, which was not designed for the loads it is now carrying. It's long past time to relieve highways of some of their traffic burden by investing in rail.

Extending existing passenger-rail services into Ohio and building the Ohio Hub would require investments in track, signals and station facilities. Some say we can't afford to make such investments, but the truth is we can't afford not to. Investing in rail makes sound economic sense.

Let's reconnect Ohio with trains now.

BILL HUTCHISON, President, All Aboard Ohio, Columbus