

High Speed Rail and Area Economic Development: International Experience with HSR-Supportive Strategies

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ABSTRACT

High-speed intercity rail service can create significant economic development opportunities for cities and regions. These opportunities build on the connected cities' unique characteristics. Previous studies by EDR Group assessed US cities of different sizes, economic structure, and geographic location and concluded that the ability to transform high-speed-rail-generated traffic volumes into economic growth is highly dependent on interactions between land use, surface connections and economic development strategies. Managing these interactions in turn requires coordinated policy efforts across levels of government.

For example, station location is largely determined at the national (or sometimes international) level of government and fairly early on in the process of system design. The selected station location—whether external to a city or more centrally accessible—will then be a major driver of subsequent decisions and outcomes. Land use policies that can be used to support station-oriented development or transit access to stations, on the other hand, are primarily under the control of local authorities, and will likely need to evolve over time as local demand responds to the improved accessibility provided by new HSR service. Still, the universe of options available for land use and transportation planning at the local and regional levels is constrained or enabled by higher-level decisions regarding the location of a station relative to the urban area being served.

This presentation will be an update on prior work by EDR Group, drawing from new sources of research on international high-speed rail planning and implementation experience, including a series of stakeholder interviews and site visit to smaller cities with planned high-speed rail services in Portugal and the UK conducted by Naomi Stein as part of her master's thesis research into the high-speed rail implementation process (for the MIT Regional Transportation Planning and High-Speed Rail Research Group).

Results from on-the-ground investigations, supported by a review of practice elsewhere in the world, offer further understanding of the significance and challenges associated with “HSR-supportive” development and transport strategies.

This presentation will address, in particular, the challenges and opportunities associated with the multi-jurisdictional environment in which high-speed rail is planned and implemented. The uncertainty of long-term development and economic impacts is found to be a source of friction in the interaction between local planning concerns and national objectives. Building on research conducted as part of NCHRP 02-24 (Productivity Implications of Transportation Investment) and SHRP C11 (Tools for Assessing Wider Economic Benefits), the presentation will briefly examine the capabilities and limitations of available methods for assessing these economic development consequences—particularly as they related to high-speed rail service.

The level to which HSR-supportive strategies are incorporated into the overall high-speed rail planning process influences the realized physical reality of the system and the degree to which it is integrated into

local land use and transport systems. Nevertheless, there are real and legitimate barriers to the investment of additional resources for local rail supportive strategies. In examining the interactions between local and national governments, this research assesses decision-making processes relative to the policy goal of achieving “smarter” or more sustainable forms of growth. The presentation will offer two possible approaches to building a HSR implementation process that successfully incorporates HSR-supportive local and regional policies. The approaches combine formal inter-jurisdictional planning commitments with informal coalition building, to together enhance HSR’s ability to achieve its full potential. This presentation aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about how decision-making and planning processes can be enhanced to capture the full range of desired outcomes of transportation investment.

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