

strengthen our energy security, we need to invest in intercity passenger rail. Amtrak removes almost eight million cars from the road annually and eliminates the need for 50,000 fully loaded, passenger airplanes each year.

Other countries already make an annual commitment to intercity passenger rail. In 2003 alone, France invested \$10.6 billion in its rail system; Germany invested \$12.4 billion; and the United Kingdom invested \$7.8 billion. Outside of Europe, Japan invests about \$2 billion annually to its Shinkansen and China has launched a plan to spend a total of \$162 billion from 2006 through 2010 to expand its railway system.

These investments have paid off: passenger rail accounts for 32 percent of Japan's transportation market; the Eurostar, the high-speed passenger train operator between Britain and mainland Europe, recently reported a 21.3 percent rise in passengers to 2.17 million between January and March 2008, compared with the same period last year, with a 25 percent increase in ticket revenues. Indeed, you can hardly purchase a plane ticket from London to Brussels or London to Paris because rail service is faster and easier than air service.

H.R. _____, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 authorizes more than \$14.4 billion for Amtrak capital and operating grants, state intercity passenger grants, and high-speed rail over the next five years. The bill authorizes \$6.7 billion (an average of \$1.34 billion per year) to Amtrak for capital grants and \$3.0 billion (an average of \$606 million per year) for operating grants. Past inconsistent Federal support has hampered Amtrak's ability to replace catenaries, passenger cars, bridges, ties, and other equipment necessary for Amtrak to provide service. These capital grants will help Amtrak bring the Northeast Corridor to a State of Good Repair, procure new rolling stock, rehabilitate existing bridges, as well as make additional capital improvements and maintenance over its entire network. In addition, the operating grants authorized under the bill will help Amtrak pay salaries, health costs, overtime pay, fuel costs, facilities, and train maintenance and operations. These operating grants will also ensure that Amtrak can meet its obligations under its recently negotiated labor contract.

In an effort to encourage the development of new and improved intercity passenger rail services, the bill creates a new State Capital Grant program for intercity passenger rail capital projects, based on the New Starts transit capital program administered by the Federal Transit Administration. The bill provides \$2.5 billion (\$500 million per year) for grants to States to pay for the capital costs of facilities and equipment necessary to provide new or improved intercity passenger rail. The Federal share of the grants is up to 80 percent. The Secretary of Transportation would award these grants on a competitive basis for projects based on economic performance, expected ridership, and other factors.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, established to develop a national transportation vision to address surface transportation needs for the next 50 years, recommends that the United States establish a high-speed rail network that spans the entire country. The bill authorizes \$1.75 billion (\$350 million per year) for grants to States and/or Amtrak to finance the con-

struction and equipment for 11 authorized high-speed rail corridors. The Federal share of the grants is up to 80 percent. The Secretary of Transportation would also award these grants on a competitive basis.

Many of Amtrak's service routes outside the Northeast Corridor suffer from poor service reliability and on-time performance because of freight traffic congestion. This congestion prevents Amtrak from retaining and attracting new ridership, and increases Amtrak's operating costs. The Department of Transportation Inspector General recently reported that if Amtrak achieved an 85 percent on-time performance outside the Northeast Corridor in fiscal year 2006, it would have saved Amtrak \$136.6 million, or almost one-third of its operating budget. Amtrak is required by law to have preferred access on freight corridors; however, freight railroads do not always comply with Amtrak's access rights. The bill addresses this problem by providing congestion grants to Amtrak and the States for high-priority rail corridors in order to reduce congestion and facilitate ridership growth.

Federal support of Amtrak was cut drastically in fiscal years 2000 and 2001, forcing Amtrak to assume a large amount of debt to stay in operation. Amtrak has aggressively targeted this debt, paying down \$600 million from fiscal years 2002 through 2007. Our bill helps Amtrak to take further steps to reduce its debt, authorizing \$345 million each year for debt service through FY 2013. This funding will allow Amtrak to focus its resources on improving existing services and making additional capital and operational improvements.

Finally, no Federal guidelines currently exist to mediate disputes between commuter rail providers and freight railroads over use of freight rail tracks or rights-of-way, nor is there a standard forum for negotiating commuter rail operating agreements. The bill establishes a forum at the STB to help complete stalled commuter rail negotiations, helping our rail network operate as efficiently as possible.

The Committee is also introducing, H.R. _____, the "Rail Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century", authorizing \$12 billion of tax-credit bonds and \$12 billion of tax-exempt bonds for high-speed rail corridors over the next 10 years. This legislation will be referred to the Committee on Ways and Means and I look forward to working with Chairman RANGEL and Ranking Member MCCREY on this important initiative.

Amtrak and high-speed rail are essential to create the world's preeminent national transportation network.

I look forward to working with Members of the Committee and the House to pass these important bills.

SUPPORTING COMMEMORATION OF ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. JOHN J. HALL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 8, 2008

Mr. HALL of New York. Madam Speaker, I am pleased that I have the opportunity to rise today in strong support and commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Israel. It is an honor to be able to speak on behalf of a country born in the aftermath of tragedy, erected against

formidable odds, and yet has prevailed to become a beacon of hope and an example of the prevailing strength of liberty and freedom.

Israel was not simply established, it was built. It was built through the toil, strife and resolve of the Jewish people and upon the premise of hope—hope that even in the wake of the ashes of the holocaust, goodness can prevail. And indeed, as we commemorate Israel's 60th birthday, we can see that goodness has prevailed.

In many ways, the path of Israel has mimicked that of the United States. It is in no way perfect and makes its fair share of mistakes. However, it is part of the same experiment of democracy, and built upon the notion of a state becoming a light unto other nations. In our century, the partnership between Israel and the United States has conjoined to thwart the existence of terrorism, advance the frontiers of human knowledge, and make an indelible contribution to the human condition.

Madam Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to foster the United States' alliance and friendship with this great nation to join me in wishing Israel a very happy 60th anniversary.

IN HONOR OF ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 8, 2008

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 60th anniversary of Yom Ha'atzmaut—Israel's Independence Day, to congratulate the Israeli people on their significant accomplishment, and to celebrate the strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

As the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, I very much appreciate the important role that Israel plays in the world for the Jewish people. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created providing a new homeland and safe haven for those who most recently had survived the Holocaust and for Jews before and since who had been scattered throughout the world after a millennia of conflict, discrimination, and persecution.

I am proud that the United States was one of the first countries to recognize Israel. Today, the U.S.-Israel relationship continues to be strong. And I pledge to work with our trusted ally to pursue a stable and peaceful Middle East, which assures safety and security for the State of Israel.

In the quest for peace in the Middle East, the United States has no stronger partner than Israel. As the Middle East's only democratic country, Israel is an important example for other countries in the region. It has free elections, a free press, and protection of minority rights. It is a strong and vibrant democracy and a trusted friend.

Maintaining a democratic society has not been easy. Israel has endured neighbors that have attempted to wipe it off the map, and it continues to face threats from terrorist organizations which oppose Israel's existence and seek to disrupt any possibility of a peaceful coexistence for all people.

Even today as Israel seeks security within its borders and peace with its neighbors, radical extremists attack its citizens with daily