

Rachel Smith Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials hearing titled "When Unlimited Potential Meets Limited Resources: The Benefits and Challenges of High-Speed Rail and Emerging Rail Technologies."

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Crawford and distinguished members of the committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today on the enormous potential of high-speed rail across the country, and specifically, the benefits of a Cascadia Ultra High Speed Corridor rail line connecting riders in one of the fastest-growing regions in North America, from Vancouver BC to Seattle to Portland, and ultimately to other points south: Salem, Eugene, and northern California.

My name is Rachel Smith and I am the President and CEO of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. The Seattle Metro Chamber is the largest and most diverse business association in the Puget Sound region, representing over 2,500 companies and a regional workforce of approximately 750,000.

Our region is a deeply interconnected one. The nearly 9 million people living in the Cascadia corridor, up to BC, through Washington state, and south to Oregon, do not live their lives – or do their business – by city, county, or even national boundaries. And the way we address challenges and seize opportunities for more equitable transportation, land use, housing, and economic centers should and does reflect that.

For our region's business community, those challenges and opportunities are why we believe in the transformative power of rail, and why the Seattle Metro Chamber has been an early supporter of high speed rail in the Cascadia Corridor.

Fast, frequent, and reliable rail is an economic competitiveness tool for any region. Providing people with alternatives to sitting in traffic, mobility to move seamlessly from work to home to recreational activities, and building community around modern transit technology helps attract talent and adds to the vibrancy of a community. It also frees up precious highway and road space for the efficient movement of goods from our farms and manufacturing centers to the hearts of our cities and towns.

Rail is also a significant tool in our efforts to combat climate change, reducing emissions from cars. In our region, rail is often powered by clean hydro or other renewable energy sources. It also impacts land use; the transportation you build defines the land use you live with, and rail is a tool for supporting growth where we want it and creating connections to job centers for everyone.

Investment in rail, and transit generally, is also fundamentally an investment in equity. It provides access for historically under-resourced communities to educational and job opportunities. It also allows for the creation of equitable transit oriented development – using a station as an anchor for mixed use, mixed income development, where everyone has mobility opportunities, whether they live in affordable or market-rate housing.

And finally, high speed rail can provide the physical manifestation of three things the Seattle Metro Chamber, our region, and this country, are laser-focused on: innovation, green jobs, and economic recovery. A project like this creates thousands of jobs: not just jobs that require an engineering degree, but also construction jobs that come with training and transferable skills for people to make a living wage for themselves and their families.

Not every corner of the country is ready for high speed rail right now – in the Puget Sound region and the Cascadia Corridor, we are.

And we've already got a head start. In my former role as Deputy County Executive for the King County Executive, we had the opportunity to work with one of our biggest and best local companies, Microsoft, who led the inception of the Cascadia Corridor high speed rail idea. After securing funding for an initial study from the Washington State Legislature, followed by feasibility work confirming the demand for high speed rail and the viability of the project, we are on our way to this idea becoming a reality, and what our region learns along the way can be used in other regions around the country.

This project can serve as a model for how high speed rail can help a region grow affordably and sustainably – and it would also serve as an important step toward building a domestic capability for high-speed rail and the good jobs this industry could generate.

And to paint the picture more clearly: the Cascadia Ultra High Speed Corridor rail line would connect riders from Vancouver BC to Seattle to Portland at speeds of up to 250 miles per hour. Conservative estimates place ridership at between 2-3 million riders annually with reduction of 6 million metric tons of CO2 emissions over the first 40 years. \$355 billion in economic growth is projected with 200,000 new jobs related to construction and ongoing operation.

We are prepared to build a coalition of support, refine the vision, and secure early funding and agreements to make this picture a reality. We have a strong foundation to build on, with support from the governors of Washington and Oregon as well as the premier of British Columbia. We also appreciate the interest in the promise of high speed rail from members of the Washington delegation, including Rep. Suzan DelBene, who is one of the original sponsors of the American High Speed Rail Act.

We have a history in the Seattle region of working together to deliver on big ideas. With the need for recovery, it is more important than ever that we continue building a more deeply interconnected region full of economic opportunity for all. We believe that high speed rail is a key ingredient in fulfilling that vision.