

Castle wants Wilmington on Acela route (The News Journal)

Bill seeks corridors for fast rail system

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WASHINGTON --

Plans for speedier train travel from Wilmington to New York or Washington would be set in motion under legislation expected to go before the U.S. House of Representatives for a vote today.

The

Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 would authorize nearly \$2 billion in the next five years for 11 high-speed rail corridors, with priority in the Northeast.

The

Acela Express Service, which shares winding tracks with commuter lines, already takes passengers from Washington to New York in less than three hours.

But this

legislation calls for rail service expected to reach speeds of at least 110 mph, making the trip less than two hours. The route is expected to have dedicated and straighter tracks, although the legislation doesn't make such specifications.

The

legislation would require the secretary of transportation to request proposals for financing, design, construction and operations.

Rep.

Mike Castle, R-Del., is seeking passage of an amendment that would ensure stops at or near the Northeast corridor's busiest Amtrak stations, which include Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore.

"Our concern is that we want to make sure if there's a high-speed rail train, it stops in Wilmington," Castle said.

The bill would authorize \$14.4 billion for Amtrak and also for states to develop intercity passenger rail systems in addition to high-speed rail.

The bill is controversial because it calls for opening up the Washington-to-Boston route and 10 others across the country to private competitors -- something Democrats like Sen. Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey strongly oppose.

Though President Bush likes the privatization proposal, White House officials issued a veto threat Monday. Bush rejects boosting funding for passenger rail if Amtrak isn't held more accountable and doesn't change the way it does business, according to a statement.

Lautenberg, meanwhile, co-wrote an \$11.4 billion Amtrak bill that passed the Senate 70-22 in October. House and Senate negotiators have to come up with a compromise bill, which would then have to pass Congress and win Bush's signature.