

Congress lays tracks for high speed rail service in Wilmington and the Northeast Corridor (Community News)

Wilmington, Del. —

East Coast lawmakers, including Congressman Mike Castle (R-Del.), are taking a closer look at improving high-speed passenger rail service nationwide -- especially the North East Corridor, where centrally-located Wilmington train station ranks as the 11th most utilized station in the country.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is requesting proposals for better high speed service between New York and Washington, D.C., and 10 other heavily-traveled corridors across the nation.

Castle, along with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, U.S. Representative John L. Mica (R-Fla.), the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Republican Leader, and New York Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney made the announcement Monday afternoon at New York's Penn Station.

One of the provisions to the legislation added by Castle is to insure that the Wilmington station would be included, because it is so heavily used.

"This is a project we have been working on for some time," Castle said from the Wilmington station. "We got legislation passed that was signed by the president.

Some money has been set aside, he said, and now groups like Amtrak can come in with proposals, which may include a high-speed, interstate rail system, higher speed than Acela, in designated areas around the country. The North East Corridor would be the most obvious choice for the new technology, since it is so heavily traveled.

Castle, who travels to work by train, said the benefits to Delaware could be tremendous.

"The traffic we have through Delaware on Interstate 95, most of which is not even Delawareans, causes environmental issues. Trains are environmentally sound. This is an opportunity to create jobs, it is true infrastructure and it can improve transit in terms of economic competition. They talk about the Mag-Love train in Shanghai going upwards of 270 mph. I'm not suggesting that's the technology that will be proposed here, but it could be," he said.

Either way, "you will have technological and environmental improvements and infrastructure opportunities," said Delaware's only Congressman.

Castle warned that the proposals may be costly, partly because of property costs in many regions where tunnels or bridges may be needed. The project has no specific timetable right now.