

**WASHINGTON POST - March 26, 2010**  
**Op-Ed Column**

**A rail corridor along I-81 that would get traffic and the economy moving again**

By Bob Riley, Haley Barbour, Ed Rendell, Phil Bredesen and Bob McDonnell

At the White House jobs summit in December, President Obama told dozens of corporate leaders that he is looking for ["every demonstrably good idea"](#) to put Americans back to work.

Here's one. It's an idea that will not only create jobs but also reduce highway congestion, improve safety and take more than 1 million long-haul trucks off the road each year.

Interstates connecting the South and Northeast are choked with traffic. As much as 40 percent of the traffic on Interstate 81 in Virginia is made up of trucks on a highway designed to carry no more than 15 percent truck traffic. And traffic on the increasingly congested road is projected to increase 67 percent over the next decade. Building interstates isn't a solution: There is not enough land, and the federal and state governments don't have the money.

A project called the Crescent Corridor, a 2,500-mile rail route stretching across 13 states from New Jersey to Tennessee and Louisiana, would offer significant economic and environmental benefits by creating tens of thousands of jobs and moving trucks off crowded highways such as I-81.

Our five states have joined together in a public-private partnership to apply for \$300 million in federal funding to develop the corridor, which would dramatically increase rail capacity along the route and represent one of the largest additions of freight transportation capacity since the Interstate Highway System in 1956. The federal money would leverage more than \$140 million in state investment and the \$264 million that Norfolk Southern Corp., whose freight trains operate along the route, has committed to the project.

A study by the transportation consulting firm Cambridge Systematics estimates that, over the next 30 years, the Crescent Corridor project would return \$25 in economic and environmental benefits for every dollar invested.

This is an investment in America's future and is exactly the kind of initiative that answers the president's call for new private-sector participation to get the economy moving again. It also offers the "demonstrably good idea" the president is looking for -- a project that will generate jobs for America. The projections for the Crescent Corridor project are 47,000 jobs by 2020 and 73,000 by 2030.

Now is the time to act. The Transportation Department predicts that demand for freight transportation in the United States will increase 92 percent by 2035. Nearly twice as much demand means more traffic on our roads, more wasted fuel, more lost time and more frustrated motorists.

Freight rail is a safe, clean, fuel-efficient alternative to new highways. One train can haul as much freight as nearly 300 trucks. Railroads are at least three times more fuel efficient than trucks. Railroads, on average, move a ton of freight 457 miles on just a gallon of fuel. If 10 percent of the long-distance freight moving by truck were shifted to rail, more than a billion gallons of fuel would be saved per year.

Because greenhouse gas emissions are directly related to fuel consumption, moving freight by rail instead of truck also reduces greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds or more. Along the Crescent Corridor, that would translate into a savings of an estimated 170 million gallons a year in fuel and significantly reduced emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and other particulate matter.

With those kinds of numbers, it's obvious that shifting freight to rail on the Crescent Corridor would provide enormous public benefits.

We anticipate similar benefits for each state -- fewer long-haul trucks on our highways, fuel savings, cleaner air, less congestion and fewer accidents -- as well as new jobs and economic development opportunities.

Working together through this public-private partnership, America can accomplish what none of us -- industry, the federal government or the states -- can do alone. Working together, we can create jobs, ease the country's transportation burden, and build a stronger American economy not just for today but for the long haul.

*Bob Riley, a Republican, is governor of Alabama. Haley Barbour, a Republican, is governor of Mississippi. Ed Rendell, a Democrat, is governor of Pennsylvania. Phil Bredesen, a Democrat, is governor of Tennessee. Bob McDonnell, a Republican, is governor of Virginia.*