

June 22, 2009

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today chaired a Congressional hearing in Pittsburgh to examine the future of passenger rail travel in western Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. As a member of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Altmire is working to establish more commuter rail options in western Pennsylvania and to ensure that Pittsburgh is better integrated into our nation's rail network.

Altmire was joined at the hearing by U.S. Congressman Bill Shuster (PA-09), the ranking member of the House Transportation Committee's Subcommittee on Rail, U.S. Congressman Tim Murphy (PA-18), and a dozen rail experts from across the country.

“Congestion on our nation’s highways and delays in our nation’s aviation system cost our economy billions of dollars each year,” Altmire said. “By investing in passenger rail service nationwide, we can alleviate gridlock and spur new economic development. As Congress determines its transportation spending priorities, I want to make sure that western Pennsylvania is well positioned to benefit from the expansion of passenger rail service nationwide.”

Amidst ongoing concerns about congestion and high gas prices, Amtrak has experienced six straight years of record ridership. Given the public's increased need for and use of passenger rail, Congress is expected to invest billions of dollars in the development of high speed rail corridors nationwide as part of the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, major legislation that will lay out the federal government's transportation spending priorities for the next five years.

In order to ensure Pittsburgh can benefit from this increased investment in passenger rail service, Altmire is working to include a provision in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act that would establish Pittsburgh to Cleveland as one of the nation's future high speed rail corridors. When combined with improved rail service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, this would help to create efficient passenger rail service between Chicago and Philadelphia and would establish Pittsburgh as a hub for rail travel between the Midwest and the East Coast.

Altmire is also committed to advancing the development of passenger rail service within western Pennsylvania. As part of the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, Altmire has requested that \$6 million be allocated for the planning and design of the Allegheny Valley Commuter Rail. This project -- which would provide passenger rail service from Westmoreland County and the Alle-Kiski Valley to downtown Pittsburgh and eventually the Pittsburgh International Airport -- could help to alleviate congestion along Route 28. Altmire previously secured \$500,000 in the FY 2008 budget for a study that will lay the groundwork for the Allegheny Valley Commuter Rail.

