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PITTSBURGH — U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, said Monday he is working to get the area between Pittsburgh and Cleveland labeled a potential high-speed-rail corridor.

No plans are in the works to develop high-speed rail in the corridor. But the designation, Altmire said during a congressional hearing in Pittsburgh, could help spur development by positioning the corridor for federal transportation funding in the future.

High-speed passenger rail, ranging from service that operates at around 100 mph, as trains do in eastern Pennsylvania, to plans by companies such as McKeesport's Maglev Inc. to make trains that go more than 250 mph, is attracting increasing attention in Washington. A proposed \$500 billion transportation spending plan would dedicate \$50 billion for high-speed-rail development over the next six years, and \$8 billion in stimulus money has been set aside for high-speed-rail projects as well.

There are 10 federally designated high-speed-rail corridors across the country, including the so-called Keystone Corridor between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and a Chicago hub network that includes a line to Cleveland.

Altmire, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee who chaired Monday's congressional hearing, called the corridor between Pittsburgh and Cleveland "the missing link."

"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 said.

Within the region, Altmire said, the improved connection between Pittsburgh and Cleveland could establish the larger region as a center for high-tech, biomedical and other industries, and spur development in areas all along the corridor, such as Beaver County.

Monday's 2½-hour congressional hearing, held at the U.S. Post Office and Courts Building on Grant Avenue in Pittsburgh, touched on a number of other passenger rail issues, from the potential of boosting the frequency and speed of Amtrak's round-trip service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg to Maglev's plans to develop a 54-mile, high-speed line from Pittsburgh International Airport to Greensburg.