

## **Rail projects get \$8 billion boost**

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Joan Lowy, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – High-speed rail projects in California, Florida and Illinois are among the big winners of \$8 billion in grants announced Thursday by the White House – the start of what some Democrats tout as a national rail-building program that could rival the interstate highways begun in the Eisenhower era.

President Barack Obama announced the awards during a town hall meeting in Tampa, Fla. – a follow-up to Wednesday's State of the Union address that focused on getting Americans back to work. Thirteen passenger rail corridors in 31 states will receive grants, which are funded by the economic recovery act enacted last year.

Obama said focusing on building 21st-century infrastructure projects is an important element of the country's economic recovery.

"It creates jobs immediately and it lays the foundation for a vibrant economy in the future," Obama said.

Though the administration bills the program as "high-speed rail," most U.S. projects won't reach the speeds seen in Europe and Asia. California's trains would be by far the fastest, exceeding the 200 mph achieved by some trains overseas.

Some of the money will go toward trains with top speeds of 110 mph, while other funds – such as the \$400 million allotted to Ohio to connect Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati – will be for trains traveling no faster than 79 mph.

A half-dozen Cabinet members and other senior administration officials were fanning out across the country for rail events Thursday and today. The White House said rail projects will create or save thousands of jobs in areas including track laying, manufacturing, planning, engineering and rail maintenance and operations.

Obama told the crowd at Thursday's town hall that when the high-speed rail line connecting Tampa and Orlando is finished, "I'm going to come back down here and ride it."

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and members of Congress have acknowledged they expect much of the expertise and equipment to be supplied by foreign companies.

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