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24 states, DC, Amtrak vying for high-speed train money that was to go to Florida

By Associated Press, Wednesday, April , 11:04 AM

WASHINGTON — Twenty-four states, the District of Columbia and Amtrak are vying for \$2.4 billion in federal aid that became available when Florida's governor canceled a high-speed rail project in his state, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Wednesday.

The deadline for applications for the funds was Monday. The Transportation Department is reviewing 90 applications seeking a total of \$10 billion, LaHood said.

"They know that high-speed rail will deliver tens of thousands of jobs, spur economic development across their communities and create additional options for their citizens as the country's population grows," LaHood said in a statement.

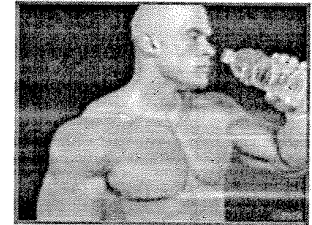
Among the requests was one from Amtrak for \$1.3 billion to enhance train service in the Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington. The proposal includes a \$720 million project to replace the more than 100-year-old movable Portal Bridge over the Hackensack River in New Jersey with a new, high-level fixed bridge.

Amtrak's application also includes \$188 million for preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for two new tunnels under the Hudson River into Manhattan and \$50 million for similar work for the development of a new Penn Station South facility to accommodate more tracks and platforms in downtown New York.

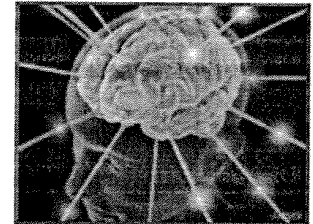
President Barack Obama has sought to make creation a national network of high-speed trains a signature project of his administration. He has said he wants to make fast trains accessible to 80 percent of Americans within 25 years.

However, Obama is receiving strong resistance from Republicans, who say the trains should be rejected unless it can be shown that they will be self-supporting.

Three Republican governors elected in November have canceled high-speed train projects in their states.



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Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker turned down \$810 million to build a Madison-to-Milwaukee high-speed line. Ohio Gov. John Kasich rejected \$400 million for a project to connect Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus with slower-moving trains. Both the Ohio and Wisconsin projects had been approved by the governors' Democratic predecessors.

In Florida, Gov. Rick Scott canceled a project that would have connected Tampa and Orlando with high-speed trains. The administration had pledged \$2.4 billion toward the project.

Scott said he was concerned that the state government would be locked into years of operating subsidies. However, a report by the state's transportation department forecast the rail line would be profitable. The project initially had been approved by Scott's predecessor, Republican-turned-independent Charlie Crist.

Wisconsin's Walker is now among the governors seeking a share of the money Scott turned down. Walker is asking for at least \$150 million to add trains for an existing Milwaukee-to-Chicago line.

In Congress, a budget proposal by House Republicans says high-speed rail and other intercity passenger rail projects should be pursued "only if they can be established as self-supporting commercial services."

Besides Wisconsin, the other states that have applied for funds are California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Washington.

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