



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 20, 2011

State Governors Take Lead in Rejecting Presidents High-Speed Rail Plan

The latest is Florida's newly elected Governor, Rick Scott, who on February 16 spurned a hefty \$2 billion in federal money that would have helped his state build a high-speed rail connection between Orlando and Tampa. Citing federal estimates of ridership and revenue he said were too optimistic, Scott predicted that the project would cost Florida taxpayers an additional \$3 billion above Obama's promised funding, and would fall well short of paying its own way. "The truth is that this project would be far too costly to taxpayers," the Governor said in turning back the funding, "and I believe the risk far outweighs the benefits."



Scott joined Governors Scott Walker of Wisconsin and John Kasich of Ohio in rejecting the President's offer of taxpayer-funded endowments for a massive project he promised would link the nation's major cities and give 80 percent of Americans access to high-speed rail service over the next 25 years. The \$53 billion would be a mere down payment, however, with the plan projected to burn up an estimated \$500 billion over the next two-plus decades.

Of course, the Governors are not alone in their rejection of the President's proposal. As reported on [TheNewAmerican.com](#), two of its most vocal critics have been U.S. Representatives John Mica (R-Fla.) and Bill Schuster (R-Pa.). Mica, a proponent of rail improvements who heads the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, noted that past federal rail subsidies, focused on America's failed "Soviet-style" Amtrak system, have succeeded in producing nothing more than "snail speed trains to nowhere." Mica added that perpetuating that failure through the President's plan "is not the way to provide modern and efficient passenger rail service."

Similarly, Schuster, who heads the House Railroad Subcommittee, observed that the Obama proposal reflects the "insanity" of the federally funded debacle that has passed for America's passenger rail service over the past 40 years. Noting that the plan, trotted out with much fanfare by Vice President Joe Biden in early February, fails to attract "private investment, capital, and the experience to properly develop and cost-effectively operate true high-speed rail." He argued that the only sound model would be one funded and operated by private investors. "Rail projects that are not economically sound will not win the future," he said. "It just prolongs the inevitable by subsidizing a failed Amtrak monopoly that has never made a profit or even broken even. Government won't develop American high-speed rail. Private investment and a competitive market will."

In his January 25 State of the Union address, President Obama had declared that a federally subsidized rail overhaul and high-speed upgrade was key to repairing the nation's tenuous economy. "To attract new businesses to our shores, we need the fastest, most reliable ways to move people, goods, and information — from high-speed rail to high-speed Internet," he said, comparing the U.S. unfavorably to



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European and Asian socialist governments that “invest more in their roads and railways than we do.”

But Governor Scott declared that the President’s high-speed dream “is not the answer to Florida’s economic recovery,” and insisted that his state should instead be “focusing on improving our ports, rail, and highway infrastructure to be in a position to attract the increased shipping that will result when the Panama Canal is expanded, when the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama are ratified, and with the expansion of the economies of central and south America.”

While Scott appears to have bought into the internationalist trade blueprint aimed toward a locked-down global economy, his and the other Governors’ rejection of federal dollars for an inevitably-nationalized high-speed train wreck nonetheless offers a hopeful sign that some public servants are intent on honoring their campaign promises to cut wasteful spending, shrink government, and give their constituents an opportunity to prosper once again.

Daniel Wood of the [Christian Science Monitor](#) wrote that the three Governors appear to be following the lead of a fourth, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, “who derailed plans for a partially federally funded train tunnel project to connect New Jersey and Manhattan.” Christie’s rejection of the planned \$9 billion rail tunnel under the Hudson River linking New Jersey and Manhattan struck a chord with his constituency, with his recent polling numbers improving six points to a 52 percent approval rating.

Wood quoted political science professor Lara Brown of Villanova University as saying that the decisions by the Republican Governors to axe high-speed rail in their respective states are based on the increasingly popular tenet of limited government — a doctrine which, while it has been reinvigorated thanks to plenty of media attention focused on Tea Party activists, has long been the foundational message of a core of conservative organizations, led most notably by [The John Birch Society](#).

“Republicans across the country are determined to demonstrate to voters that they are serious about shrinking the size of the federal government and its discretionary spending programs,” says Brown, adding that some GOP leaders “are betting on the long-term outweighing the short-term,” an idea that she points out “is not typical in politics.”

If the GOP’s political elites can convince voters that theirs is the fiscally responsible party, Brown writes, “they will not only win the 2012 cycle,” but voters may even “trust them with the reins of government for many election cycles to come.”

Photo: Gov. Rick Scott



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