

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLELAND
AMTRAK OVERSIGHT HEARING
September 26, 2000

Mr. Chairman, today's hearing has been called in response to the just-released report by the DOT Inspector General on the state of Amtrak's financial performance. The report states, and I quote, "Without major corrective action Amtrak will not achieve operating self-sufficiency in 2003." Today we will have the opportunity to hear more on the report's findings and to hear Amtrak's response.

Let me just say that in poll after poll, Americans support a nationwide passenger rail system and further, they support government contributions to keep that system running. I am amazed over estimates that show that Congress has provided just enough support to keep Amtrak operating at the level of service it has offered for the past 29 years. Since its creation in 1971, Amtrak has received just \$23 billion from the Congress, for an average contribution of \$790 million a year. By contrast, Western European governments, in just 9 years, from 1980 to 1989, provided \$101 billion to their railways. This is more than four times what Amtrak has received in the entire 29 years of its history.

In a House hearing this spring, it was pointed out that several States across this country are appropriating funds to make improvements in their passenger rail service, even in the absence of federal matching funds. And no wonder: High speed rail is a viable alternative to two of the 21st century's most challenging and frustrating problems, sprawl and traffic congestion.

Mr. Chairman, the promise of high speed rail is critical in my state of Georgia. Why? Because our highways and skyways are approaching gridlock. Today Metro Atlanta has the very worst traffic congestion of any Southern city, and Metro Atlantans drive more miles than drivers in any other part of the country. Hartsfield International Airport, with 78 million passengers, is both the world's busiest airport and the world's most delay-impacted airport. Last year Hartsfield's passengers collectively experienced over 4500 days in lost time. High-speed trains offer another option--and Georgia's commitment to rail is shown in its bottom line: a state budget investment of \$45 million next year for passenger rail! And there's more: Georgia is prepared to flex over \$300 million from highway funds to passenger rail over the next 4 years.

In closing let me say that we should look hard at providing Amtrak enough money to achieve the goals mandated by Congress: to provide national service and operate at a profit. One of the best ways to do this is to enact the High Speed Rail Investment Act. An investment in high-speed, high-quality rail will benefit commuters across this land by helping our nation change its focus from moving cars to moving people, from promoting sprawl to promoting smart growth. The future of our transportation system, and therefore of our economy, depends on far-sighted national statesmanship. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

