

Chamber urges rail rethink

By Dave Hall, The Windsor Star

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A high-speed train at New York City's Penn Station is pictured in this May 2011 file photo.

Photograph by: Jessica Rinaldi/Reuters, The Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. -- The local chamber of commerce is urging the federal government to reconsider its decision to refuse funding for a high-speed rail link between Windsor and Quebec City.

Transport Minister Denis Lebel told The Star Tuesday that with a price tag of between \$18.9 billion and \$21.3 billion, the proposal is "not a priority for our government." Lebel's comments came on the heels of a report released Tuesday that suggested a high-speed link between Windsor and Toronto would not be financially viable.

Bill Anderson, chairman of the chamber's transportation committee, said Wednesday that dismissing high-speed rail for the Windsor-Quebec corridor is "short-sighted."

He said the report does not take into account the benefits of connecting Via Rail with Amtrak passenger service in the U.S., providing a high-speed rail link "all the way to Chicago.

"The U.S. government has already committed significant dollars to track improvements from Detroit to Chicago and it would seem short-sighted not to take advantage of that since it would change the entire picture."

Anderson, director of the Cross Border Transportation Centre at the University of Windsor, also said the study does not take into account the entire range of options, which could include higher-speed rail rather than a much more expensive high-speed version.

"There could still be significant improvements to the rail options even without the high-speed version," said Anderson. "It would seem to be a shame to say we're not going to do anything at all rather than look at the broad range of options."

While the study acknowledges that a MontrealOttawaToronto link has the potential to be lucrative, it concluded that adding the eastern and western portions would be too expensive.

"We hope the book isn't closed on this issue because there do seem to be some other options," said Don Marsh, interim president of the chamber.

"Higher speed is doable at a less expensive cost and from our perspective, it deserves to be debated fully," said Marsh. "We're planning to open up some dialogue between chambers along the route to see what other options exist.

"In our view, the report does not look at the entire picture."

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