

Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) today welcomed the release of \$50 million in federal stimulus funds for the "Vermont" rail line from St. Albans to Vernon, Vt.

The high-speed rail project will be the second in the nation to break ground using funds that Congress approved in last year's economic recovery act. (Maine's "Downeaster" line was first.)

The grant was awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration using economic stimulus money set aside for the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program.

The upgrades to this 190-mile stretch of track will allow trains to travel up to 59 mph – and even 79 mph in some sections – cutting valuable time off the route between St. Albans and Washington, D.C. The improvements could cut an hour off of the trip through Vermont and Massachusetts.

Leahy said, "This is the biggest single investment in passenger rail improvements we have had in Vermont since Amtrak was created. We have long sought these improvements, which are just the ticket for a shorter and smoother ride on the Vermonter. I'm proud that Vermont is now moving forward with the largest single rail improvement project in the entire nation. This is a solid investment in our future and a vote of confidence in passenger rail service in Vermont."

Sanders said, "In the near future, this investment will create much-needed employment for Vermont workers. In the long term, it will strengthen our economy as we improve Vermont's transportation infrastructure for both cargo and passengers." Sanders recently raised concerns with the Federal Railroad Administration over delays in releasing the funds. He said he was pleased by the speedy response.

Welch said, "With the release of these funds, the Recovery Act is putting Vermonters to work and laying the groundwork for the future of Vermont's transportation infrastructure. The speed with which this project is moving forward is a testament to Vermonters' support for the many benefits of high-speed rail: commuting convenience, business development and

environmentally friendly travel. Once again, the Recovery Act is reimagining and revitalizing Vermont's infrastructure."

This project will install continuously welded rail and other track improvements, new crossties, and grade crossing safety improvements on track owned by the New England Central Railroad, which is contributing \$20 million to the project. The improvements will also set the stage for more frequent service along this corridor and for extending the "Vermont" service to Montreal, Quebec.

The Vermont congressional delegation also has written a letter of support for federal funding for a rail corridor project in western Vermont. The state has sought a \$60- million federal grant for a rail line from Bennington to Burlington.