

Foreign manufacturers see a future for 'higher-speed' trains in America

SEVERAL HAVE OPENED FACTORIES IN U.S.

By Paul Nussbaum
The Philadelphia Inquirer
PHILADELPHIA — Can you have a European- or Japanese-style high-speed rail experience, even if the train is creeping along at less than 150 miles per hour?

Yes, say international manufacturers who are touting the prospects of smooth, quiet, luxurious rides for American passengers, even though it will be many years, even decades, before 220-mph bullet trains show up in the United States.

"Higher-speed" trains with many of the same aerodynamic features and interior amenities of France's TGV or Japan's Shinkansen may be the American stepping-stone to true high-speed rail, as the United States looks for affordable improvements to its old-fashioned, slow passenger rail network.

Foreign-based high-speed train-builders, such as Alstom (France), Siemens (Germany), and Talgo (Spain), have opened American factories to make modern trains that can run on conventional tracks in the United States, with hopes of eventually winning high-speed contracts, as well.

Many of the manufactur-

ers were in Philadelphia last week, showing their wares at the eighth World Congress on High-Speed Rail.

"We are bringing technology from Europe to the U.S. and engineering it here," said Stephen Robillard, vice president of high-speed rail for Siemens. Siemens hopes to sell its RailJet, capable of running at 160 mph, for use on existing American routes.

"It's a whole different comfort level than anything in the U.S. now," said Robillard, citing first-class, business-class, and coach-class sections; smoother rides; and lighter-weight construction, as well as plush interiors.

Foreign manufacturers will have to build trains in this country, with American labor and materials, to meet "Buy American" requirements, but many of the international companies complain that the United States lacks the supply chain for parts and materials because there has been no high-speed industry here.

Incremental improvements may allow the U.S. suppliers to catch up, as well as build support among passengers and politicians, the foreign manufacturers say.

"We think this is the way the United States is going," said Antonio Perez, president of Talgo America. "It goes

incrementally, or nothing happens."

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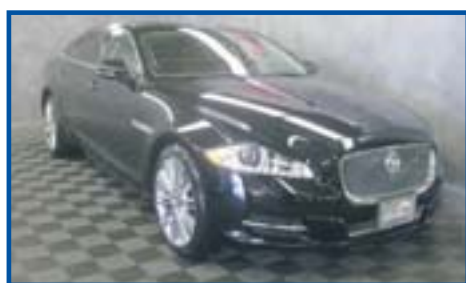
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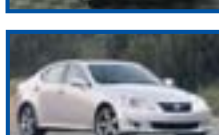
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