



## HIGH-SPEED RAIL INDUSTRY LEADERS GROUP

### High-speed rail is not about trains

David Carol  
Parsons Brinckerhoff

#### The challenge

In all the hype about 200 mph speeds and futuristic-looking trains, the fundamental focus of a high-speed rail (HSR) programme often gets overlooked. While the engineers necessarily must define alignments and build tracks and trains, the ultimate objective of a HSR project is to convince travellers to choose the train over the car or the plane. It is critical that those planning new HSR systems, for standalone systems or for existing tracks, undertake the preliminary work to understand their unique HSR market, identify the defining passenger experience attributes, and create a HSR brand that will drive the system design.

#### The solution

The passenger experience should be considered from the outset of the planning process. Designing to the HSR brand should drive decision making at each step of the planning and implementation. The passenger experience includes all key elements of the journey, so HSR planning must go further than merely alignment, stations and trains. The 'HSR Brand' – the services that define the HSR experience – may be the most important factor shaping HSR design and implementation. Most analysis points to three key factors affecting traveller choice: duration, price and frequency. The successful HSR service however, will attempt to define and control such other important factors as:

- **Trip planning** – reservations, websites, phonedlines, printed info, advertising
- **Ticketing** – on-line, through the mail, at the station, on the train
- **Station access** – location, signage and way-finding, ease of access, security, parking, waiting/lounge areas
- **Pre-departure** – aesthetics, amenities (inc. retail), cleanliness, signage, security, crowd control, information and announcements, personnel
- **Platforms** – lighting, safety, walking distance, luggage movement, air quality
- **On-board experience** – food service, seating/reservations, cleanliness, staff, entertainment, baggage, safety, noise, Wi-Fi, electrical outlets, temperature
- **Train service** – reliability and safety
- **On arrival** – amenities, information and assistance, access to public transportation, signage and way-finding, customer service problem resolution.





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#### **How it works**

As soon as there is a perceived need for or benefit from HSR in a transportation corridor, a business case should be developed that defines its advantages, the steps required, and the funding approaches available. It's then essential to determine what the HSR service must deliver to the passenger. While there may be multiple approaches, all require a comprehensive analysis of the travel market in which the train will operate. Who is the prime competitor and what can this service provide that they cannot? How critical is public transport access to stations? How important are emotional elements (e.g. the 'wow' factor) in determining choice, and which are the most important? The data serves as the foundation for brand development and should give insight into what really drives the customer. It should define which of these 'other' brand factors will make a genuine difference, and how they can be best integrated.

#### **The benefits**

Defining and integrating passenger experience into a new HSR service has proven very successful on many European and Asian systems.

- › In Spain, development of the AVE brand helped to create what has become one of the best HSR systems in the world.
- › In the United States, Amtrak's Acela brand, developed in the mid-'90s, is a case in point, seeking as it did to create a new HSR service that broke from Amtrak's troubled past, and recognising the need for an entirely different and comprehensive branding effort. A small internal team reviewed extensive focus group data regarding both existing concerns and future requirements. Most of this research was incorporated into the Acela brand and eventually into significant revisions in train and station design.

