

It was with great dismay that I read "Faster High-Speed Rail: Albany should heed CSX's legitimate concerns," published on April 26.

First, let me be clear that I agree wholeheartedly with the editorial board's declaration: "there's no doubt that high-speed rail would be good for New York."

A report by the United States Conference of Mayors estimates at least 21,000 new jobs and \$1.1 billion in new wages can come to New York as a result of high-speed rail. Already in the Syracuse metropolitan area, an estimated 1,300 individuals are employed in businesses supporting the rail industry.

Meanwhile, the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity has identified 96 manufacturers and service providers for the passenger rail industry in our state, many of which operate in Central New York.

High-speed rail will indeed be good for New York. This is why I have worked closely with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), New York state, Amtrak and CSX on the development of a plan to accomplish this goal while ensuring freight rail remains reliable and cost efficient.

With this in mind, New York state needs a reliable partner in CSX, and many of the comments put forward earlier need to be addressed.

As Amtrak riders know, passenger and freight rail share two tracks across Upstate, resulting in passenger trains, not CSX freight, being forced to pull over on the busiest corridor in the nation. Our goal is to eliminate the current co-mingling of freight and passenger rail altogether, improving the speed, frequency and reliability of passenger trains and freeing up current tracks for freight rail. Because this line previously housed four tracks, the current right of way already has unused space.

To be clear, New York does not want to operate passenger rail on CSX's track and is studying all options for constructing a dedicated third track for high-speed passenger rail in the existing right of way. CSX, Amtrak and FRA are all participating in this ongoing study to be completed within the year.

It is particularly disturbing that prior to the completion of the joint study, CSX has arbitrarily predetermined that any new passenger track, with few exceptions, must be built 30 feet from their tracks.

How did CSX magically arrive at 30 feet before the study was completed?

In a letter to CSX in May 2010, FRA, whose purpose is "to promulgate and enforce rail safety regulations," made it clear that many issues, not only distance, must be considered as part of a comprehensive approach to shared corridor safety. I share, along with New York state, a commitment to safety.

Yet, all four other major high-speed rail corridors across the country have agreements between the states and the Class I freight haulers. In fact, the recent agreement that was reached for the Chicago-St. Louis Union Pacific corridor stated that a 20-foot track center would be maintained where possible at passenger train speeds of 110 mph trains.

Why is CSX the only Class I freight hauler unable to reach an agreement?

I ask them to honor the commitment made in their May 2010 letter to FRA. "We reiterate our willingness to explore actively exceptions and solutions on a case-by-case basis where safe and appropriate," they said.

We must work together to bring high-speed rail to Upstate. It will develop one of the largest economic trade corridors in the world, linking Upstate to Toronto, Montreal, New York City and Chicago.

High-speed rail is a win-win situation for passenger rail, freight rail and New York. The improvements to existing track and the third track are in CSX's best interest and I encourage CSX to get onboard.

Rep. Louise Slaughter is the chairwoman and founder of the Upstate Congressional Caucus and the Bi-Cameral High-Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail Caucus. A Democrat, she represents portions of Rochester, Niagara Falls and Buffalo.