After fifty years of New Yorkers complaining about the decline of upstate New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo has the vision needed to connect New Yorkers to an opportunity like never before.

Today, during his State of the State address, Governor Cuomo called for convening an expert panel to review prior studies on high-speed-rail. Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress sees this as having the potential to be a truly transformational change for New York State.

Picture this – boarding a train in Manhattan on a Saturday morning to be at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo eating hot wings for lunch. How about commuting to Penn Station from Utica in almost the same time that it takes to commute from Patchogue on Long Island? How about a one-seat train ride from Newburgh to Manhattan in less time than it takes to drive from Newburgh to Middletown? The creation of high-speed rail connecting Buffalo to New York City via Albany has the potential to breathe new life into upstate New York, and to make the outer ring suburbs competitive with the outer boroughs of NYC.

GOVERNOR CUOMO IS RIGHT TO LOOK AT HIGH-SPEED RAIL

PATTERN PROPOSES:

THE EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

HIGH-SPEED RAIL FOR THE EMPIRE STATE

Travel times are based on driving distance on existing roads and an average train speed of 155 miles per hour.
A project like this takes the same kind of vision that it took to look at the decaying and overburdened Tappan Zee Bridge, with its high annual maintenance costs and increasing likelihood of collapse, and say - let’s build something big in New York again. Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress agrees with the Governor’s proposal to dream big. Dozens of studies over the past fifty years have pointed out concerns with costs, local opposition, and other factors, but it is the position of Pattern for Progress that with the strongest leadership from Albany in decades, these challenges can and should be overcome.

At a time when the economy is the strongest it has been in over 50 years, with the stock market at all-time highs and interest rates low, now is the time to invest in major public infrastructure projects like high-speed rail in New York. Construction costs for this project will be high, but with some of the lowest interest rates in generations, now is the time for the state to bond and invest in itself. The initiation of this project would create an entire generation of construction jobs for thousands of New Yorkers. It will help to address the state’s goals of tackling carbon emissions in our effort to combat climate change. An electric high-speed rail system would decrease traffic on the already burdened NYS Thruway system as well as decreasing the number of flights taken out of New York airports – the two modes of transportation which contribute the most to our carbon footprint.

Not only will a statewide high-speed rail network create thousands of jobs over decades of construction, it will also help to alleviate the cost of living for New Yorkers by making outer suburbs more accessible to the employment opportunities in New York City. With a stop in Newburgh, possibly near Stewart Airport (“think plane to the train”), residents of our region could get to Manhattan in less time than it takes to get to Manhattan from many parts of Brooklyn. It would allow for commuters to live in more affordable locales. This new high-speed rail line would spur the most creative transit-oriented development in previously unconnected cities, with the potential to link workforce talent, economic opportunity, and quality of life like never before.

One concern for the feasibility of high-speed rail from the Hudson Valley to New York City has been the location of the existing rail right-of-ways, and how sharing lines with existing rail lines would bring high-speed trains to a crawl. Here at Pattern for Progress, we share in the vision of Governor Cuomo in thinking outside-the-box, or in this case we suggest under the ground. New York can learn from the currently under construction Chūō Shinkansen SCMaglev rail line running from Tokyo to Nagoya, where 90% of the 178 mile line will be built underground. (For context, Albany to Penn Station in Manhattan is only approximately 156 miles.)

We can learn from the dozens of high speed rails that currently exist or are under construction in Europe and Asia as to how to get this done. Now is the time to build. Let’s dream big to stop the decades long trend of New Yorkers exiting our state. Now is the time to connect New York like never before. Now is the time to embrace the vision of the Governor, and begin the "Excelsior High-Speed Rail Corridor" in 2020.

You have to dream big to solve big problems.