

Transportation Reauthorization Gets Bandaid

The U. S. House and Senate took the short fix approach to replacing the current federal surface transportation reauthorization act, SAFETEA-LU, by approving an extension through the end of September.

Congress, now on summer recess, will return to some tough decisions regarding the transportation capital. The House Transportation Committee proposed a bill calling for \$450 billion to be spent over six years, including \$350 billion for highways and bridges and \$100 billion for mass transit. The committee also wants to see \$50 billion for high-speed rail. The Senate and the administration favor an 18-month delay, because of the size of the proposed authorization.

Read the [U. S. News](#) and [Daily Herald](#) coverages of the federal re-authorization.

Video Gambling Dealt a Blow



As you may recall, video gambling is to be a key source of revenue for the capital plan approved by the Illinois legislature and Governor Quinn. Recently, though, a trend is appearing that may put a hole in that particular pocket of money.

The DuPage County board on August 11 chose to ban video gambling in its unincorporated areas. In addition, the city of Rosemont and another Chicago suburb, Country Club Hills, have also chosen to opt out of the gambling expansion.

The [Northwest Herald](#) said State Rep. Jack Franks "is urging the McHenry County Board to reject video gambling," although the newspaper also states that the County Board Chair Ken

Koehler does not want to ban video gambling, because he said the state needs the revenue. New Lenox and Frankfort, as well as Cook, Peoria and McHenry Counties, are also reported to be considering a ban.

The [*Chicago Tribune*](#) quotes Quinn saying "he isn't worried that an anti-gambling movement could put a dent in the state's \$31 billion capital budget." He cited other revenue streams that will support the capital plan, including increased drivers' fees and broadening taxable categories of products such as beauty items, candy, bottled coffee and tea, and alcohol.

Sales Tax Changes Explained

The expansion of products that will be assessed sales tax is explained in detail in attached *Belleville News Democrat* article. Sales of candy, as well as bottled coffee or tea drinks, will now be taxed. In addition, certain beauty products that were previously seen as medicinal will now be charged sales tax. Illinois law excludes medicine from sales taxable items, but many "gray area" items are now removed from that exclusion.

- [Read the BND article for details.](#)

Chicago Freight Picks Up Speed



The state's new capital bill is expected to give Chicago freight lines a needed boost in speed. With antiquated and complicated signals, switches, and track, freight trains often take as much as two days to get across the metro area. Chicago's rail network and central location are important assets to the area's economy, so modernization has been long awaited.

The CREATE program - Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency - was started in 2003 as a public-private partnership to improve rail congestion. The capital program is expected to fund 78 CREATE improvement projects, including 25 rail-highway overpasses, six new rail-over-rail "flyovers" to separate freight and passenger train tracks,

and other signal and track improvements.

- [Read the Tribune coverage of CREATE.](#)

CTA Approves Plans to Expand 3 Rail Lines

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) approved three rail-line extensions that have been in the planning for years. The extension projects will cost approximately \$2 billion, 80% of which CTA hopes will be funded by the federal government.

The *Chicago Tribune* reports that "CTA officials said they are confident the expansions will win federal funding that will cover up to 80 percent of the costs because the projects would serve thousands of riders in areas that are severely under-served by mass transit or need more mass transit to combat traffic gridlock."

The Red Line would be extended further south within Chicago city limits to 130th Street. The Orange Line would run past Midway Airport to the Ford City Mall. The Yellow Line would stretch to Old Orchard Mall in Skokie.

- [Read further details in the Tribune.](#)

Midwest Governors Agree on Rail

Governor Pat Quinn, along with Senator Dick Durbin and Mayor Richard Daley, hosted a Midwest High Speed Rail Summit on July 27, culminating in a joint [Memorandum of Understanding](#) signed by governors of eight states - Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.

"I want our region to continue to lead the nation in preparing for a high speed rail network," Durbin said. This network will create jobs, ease traffic congestion and reduce our dependence on foreign oil."

Participant states supported a nationwide network including a Chicago Hub that would connect trains traveling up to 110 miles per hour serving cities across the region, along with connections to adjoining regional corridors. In addition, the participants agreed to establish a multi-state steering group to coordinate the region's work associated with all ARRA applications. The steering group will provide a single voice in support of the region's collective high speed rail priorities.

- [See Reuters' high-speed rail article.](#)

Quinn appoints 3 to Tollway Board

Governor Pat Quinn named three new members to the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority Board, including former Waukegan Mayor Bill Morris. Morris is a municipal finance specialist who served as mayor of Waukegan from 1977 to 1985, and previously as a State Senator.

Quinn also chose public policy expert Paul Wolff as Chair of the tollway board. Wolff has been a senior executive with the group Chicago Metropolitan 2020 since 2000 and is a past president of Governors State University in University Park. Also named to the tollway board was Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner. The new members replace retiring board members.

RTA Budget Hearings Scheduled

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is hosting a series of public hearings in August and September to discuss the 2010 budget, provide updates on state and federal capital funding and review recommended projects for RTA funding programs.

Lake County's [budget hearing](#) will be held on Thursday, August 27 at 6 p.m. in Room 212 of the University Center of Lake County. The University Center, at 1200 University Center Drive in Grayslake, is located with the College of Lake County at Washington and Lancer. For more information, visit www.MovingBeyondCongestion.org.

RTA has also released its [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#) for review.

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CMAP's "Invent the Future"



Almost Complete

One month left to "Invent the Future!" The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is in its final month of its public-input phase of *GO TO 2040*, a planning process for the Chicago metropolitan area. Through early September 2009, people across the seven-county region can weigh in via interactive *GO TO 2040* web tools, workshops, kiosks and booths at community festivals. To participate, go to www.goto2040.org.

A separate part of CMAP's 2040 study will be an analysis of major transportation capital projects. Of the 53 projects that have previously been identified as "major," five are in Lake County.

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