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## Tolls Increase 40 percent on NJ Turnpike, Parkway

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Land Line Magazine – December 2, 2008

Tolls increased by forty percent on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway on Monday, December 1 under the state Turnpike Authority's capital plan that includes funding a mass transit tunnel between New Jersey and New York. In October, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority approved this and a second, 50 percent increase scheduled for 2012.

Truckers traveling the full length of the Turnpike this week were charged \$37.15, up from \$26.55. Fees for E-ZPass account holders were raised to \$33.95 during peak travel times and \$32.25 for off-peak.

Several state legislators have made unsuccessful attempts to block the increases, because they do not believe the state should divert turnpike revenue to fund a mass-transit tunnel and that the increases will run up business costs for truckers.



*This is a common argument in the transportation funding discussion regarding where it is generated versus where it is spent. MPOs make it when revenues generated in their urban areas go to fund rural state projects. Highway agencies see that the federal gas tax dollars fund transit programs around the country. Transit agencies are concerned when sales taxes go to roads. Even federal provisions for interstate tolling fall into the trap of requiring tolls generated by that facility to stay there. It's a system: we are funding a system. Hopefully we can remember this fact as transportation funding changes occur in the next few years. We should remember the saying that "the rising tide raises all boats" when seeking more transportation money. TW*

## N. Texas Lawmakers try Again for Commuter Rail

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*The Dallas Morning News* – December 3, 2008

Dozens of local leaders in North Texas are following through with their vow to try again to expand commuter rail throughout area suburbs in 2009, after lawmakers defeated the plan in 2007. A proposed bill would establish a transportation district over the Dallas-Fort Worth area, with the ability to levy taxes, under the control of the Regional Transportation Council.

If approved, the bill would give each county the authority to hold elections to enable voters to make the decision about whether to provide millions of dollars each year to pay for roads, as well as fund a 215-mile suburban light rail line. Counties choosing to hold the transportation funding elections could select from a variety of taxing options, such as a new sales tax on gasoline purchases, new property taxes or additional vehicle registration fees.

The unsuccessful 2007 bill was approved by the Senate, but failed on a technicality in the House. A similar effort in 2005 also did not pass. Cities throughout North Texas have pooled a \$1 million fund to help convince the Legislature. Arlington officials donated \$75,000 because they say the city desperately needs rail options.

Regional Transportation Council head Michael Morris said the plan would give the council the authority to build the long-desired suburban rail plan, as well as give the area funding to build roads Austin will never be able to adequately afford.

## Federal Aid Concerns Minn. Governor

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*The Bemidji Press* – December 3, 2008

*ST. PAUL* – Federal aid for struggling states could hurt the economy more than help it, Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty warned this week following a meeting with the incoming president. The governor predicts harmful inflation would result from federal deficit spending.

"It is gravely concerning, the amount of money being thrown at this problem," Pawlenty told reporters in Philadelphia, where he and other governors convened with president-elect Barack Obama. "The states should substantially fix their own problems."

Pawlenty said he would decide whether to accept the federal help when he sees an actual proposal, despite his state's position in facing an estimated \$4 billion to \$6 billion deficit (one of 45 states with substantial budget shortfalls). While Obama gave just a few specifics on an economic recovery plan, Pawlenty said the President-elect promised that funding for infrastructure, such as road construction, would be included in the program he hopes Congress will pass next month.

Other states, such as Wisconsin, were eager to accept the federal money. "It is going to help us," said the state's Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle, but his support came with a caveat: "There is not enough federal money in the world to take care of the deficits states are facing. We are going to

have to make very deep cuts in state budgets and they are going to be very painful," Doyle said.

## Transit still Popular amid Falling Gas Prices

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*Washington Post* – December 2, 2008

Prices at the pump have plummeted in recent weeks, but commuters are sticking with transit, according to transit officials in the D.C. region and beyond, who say ridership continues to rise. Spikes in ridership earlier this year were attributed to sky high gas prices by transit officials. Despite the drop in the national average from \$4.11 a gallon in July to \$1.82 this week, transit ridership continues to set records in some parts of the nation, (transit) officials said.

Metrorail ridership in the Washington, D.C. region was up 5 percent for the four months ending in October, from the same period the previous year, said senior planner Jim Hughes. Preliminary data for November indicates numbers are up 3 percent.

Industry officials say the deteriorating economy is a major factor, since transit is a less costly alternative.

"You really do save a whole lot of money by giving up the car and taking transit," said Rob Padgett, director of policy and research at the American Public Transportation Association, an industry group. For those who have traded their cars for transit, fuel is just one part of the equation in difficult economic times, he said. "If you have a car sitting in the garage, you can sell one for eight grand and that will help pay the mortgage."

Other agencies still reporting high numbers include:

- The Orange County Transportation Authority in California reported 6.3 million bus boardings in October, the highest in the agency's history.
- In Dallas, October rail ridership was up 12 percent from the previous year, with 71,400 trips.
- The Virginia Rail Express, which runs between Manassas and Fredricksburg and Union Station, reported a 12 percent increase in riders for October from the same period a year ago.
- Ridership on buses run by Loudoun County, Va., "is still trending significantly ahead of last year," county transit chief Nancy Gourley said. Daily ridership averaged 3,643 in October, up 25 percent from the previous year, and preliminary data for November indicates a more than 25 percent increase as well.

## MTA may soon get on Board with Google Transit

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*Los Angeles Times* – December 3, 2008

Google Transit may eventually be on its way to the Los Angeles front, and testing could begin as

soon as soon as early 2009, according to a top official with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Google Transit is a popular service that provides an easy way for users to plan and map trips on mass transit. Google Transit has worked in cooperation with transit agencies to post bus and/or train schedules for New York, Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento, Seattle, Denver, Atlanta, Miami, Dallas, Cleveland, Minneapolis and Pittsburgh.

The MTA's chief communications officer, Matt Raymond, said that a pilot program with Google Transit could happen soon. The two agencies have been discussing the possibility for months now, but the MTA is still not committed to a permanent relationship, citing several reasons. Among them is the MTA's willingness to surrender publicly owned data, which must be specifically formatted by the MTA for Google's use. The transit agency must also find a way to provide Google with frequent schedule updates and a way to ensure Google provides MTA customers with accurate information on the best routes for their trip.



*Google Transit is another example of how technology continues to be embedded into our lives with new and improved services made available. Our biggest challenge as transportation officials is seeing far enough into the future and preparing for it. Also, public agencies aren't nimble enough to take advantage of emerging technologies in a way that will be responsive to customer needs. Are we still installing loop detectors in pavements? I rest my case. TW*

## **Tenn. Ready to Spend \$268M in Federal Road Dollars**

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*Dyersburg State Gazette – December 1, 2008*

Tennessee officials are ready and waiting to spend more than \$268 million in federal funding from the economic stimulus bill Congress is considering. The state department of transportation has a \$1 billion wish list of 218 road and bridge projects waiting to get started when federal funding becomes available.

Tennessee's \$268 million is part of a \$12.8 billion national infrastructure bill, currently stalled in the Senate, not expected to pass before the holidays. It may come together with President-elect Barack Obama's plans to create jobs and stimulate the economy. Tennessee officials say they want to be ready to act in either case.

"We know there is going to be some stimulus package that includes transportation, so we are trying to put as many projects together as possible," said TDOT spokesperson Julie Oaks. TDOT officials have not yet decided which projects would take first priority.

## **Obama's Stimulus Package could Boost Utah Road Projects**

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*The Deseret News – December 2, 2008*

Utah officials are among the states hoping to boost the transportation budget with funding from President-elect Barack Obama's proposed economic stimulus package. After meeting with Obama

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and other governors in Philadelphia this week, Gov. Jon Huntsman said the package could help restore some of the state's \$4 billion in suspended transportation projects. At the meeting, "there was a lot of talk about infrastructure [among the governors] and the importance of expediting projects already planned," Huntsman said.

Some fellow GOP leaders in the state are already pressuring the governor to call a special session to fund projects such as the Mountain View Corridor between Salt Lake and Utah counties, which is among the projects put on hold by the state department of transportation.

In addition to the federal help, Gov. Huntsman said he is already looking at "ways to creatively bond for a good part of the transportation projects" in the new state budget. His spokesperson reported last week that Huntsman is considering a form of sales tax on gas.

## Project Selection Key in Stimulus Package

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*Washington Post* – December 3, 2008

With President-elect Barack Obama's pledge to infuse hundreds of billions of dollars into the country's infrastructure, some state officials cautioned that public works projects will not successfully pull the nation out of recession unless they are carefully selected and executed promptly. In a closed meeting in Philadelphia with 48 of the nation's governors, Obama emphasized the importance of identifying which projects could provide jobs for people right away, according to participants.

Obama reminded participants of Japan, which suffered in a ten-year recession partially a result of massive investment on construction projects in the late 90s progressed too slowly to stimulate economic growth.

At the meeting, governors from both parties assured Obama that they could start construction immediately if the federal government provided the funding to make up for state budget deficits; however, the National Governors Association said less than half of the \$136 billion in projects the governors said were ready to break ground could be underway before next summer. The governors also face political pressure in choosing among those projects.

"The problem is going to be deciding in a rational and targeted way how to spend that money," Virginia Gov. Timothy M. Kaine (D) said in an interview. "We all know about the bridges to nowhere. But we also know the projects that are critical to moving people around."



*If you get a chance to read the original article, do so (see link below); there seemed to be a sense of hesitation among some governors about their state's ability to spend the money—sending a cautionary message to Obama and Congress. It was unbelievable. Two things: First, states should never give Congress a reason not to do something. Saying you might not be able to spend the money is all the input they need to give up on finding a way to fund transportation. Second, given the right opportunity, virtually every state DOT in this country will make their part of the stimulus work. I have great confidence in these agencies. TW*

Washington Post article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/02/AR2008120203491.html>

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