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Top Transportation Officials to Gather at 1st International Conference

Florida - Key leaders in the transportation industry will meet in Florida this February to discuss challenges, innovative solutions and learn about the best practices in international construction management. The Federal Highway Administration, Transportation Research Board and AASHTO will join with speakers from around the world to prepare organizations to meet today's economic and transportation challenges.

At this aptly-timed meeting, the world's top transportation construction managers will share the latest concepts in project delivery, job generation, economic stimulants and dollar-stretching techniques.

Conference sponsors offered the following--"For years, we have been developing innovative contracting delivery methods and promoting accelerated construction techniques. If there ever was a time to use them, it is now. This conference will provide the best information the world has to offer on these two subjects. If you take home one idea, just one, you will make a difference in your home state."

For more information on the conference, visit <http://www.tcm-2.org>

5,000 "Ready-To-Go" Transportation Projects Could Put Millions to Work

AASHTO Press Release – December 5, 2008

More than 5,000 transportation projects are "ready to go," as soon as President-elect Barack Obama's proposed multi-billion dollar infrastructure stimulus package is implemented, according to a new survey by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). All 50 states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey, which identified over \$64 billion in transportation infrastructure projects as "ready to go," meaning they could be under contract within 180 days.

If funding is made available, the projects would support an estimated 1.8 million American jobs. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that approximately 35,000 jobs are supported by every \$1.25 billion invested in transportation projects.

"Right now, 41 states are facing budget shortfalls and many of our state departments of transportation have had no choice but to delay critical projects that will fill potholes, enhance safety, and extend the lifespan of the nation's ageing bridges," said AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley, adding that the survey is a critical tool for Obama in ensuring the success of the stimulus package.

In a similar AASHTO study conducted in January of this year, again all 50 states and the District of Columbia responded, identifying approximately 3,000 projects worth \$18 billion that could be under contract within 90 days.

Texas Highway Projects Poised for Stimulus Funds

WFAA-TV – December 9, 2008

DALLAS – If the federal government decides to spend \$64 billion on transportation projects to revive the U.S. economy, Texas leaders are ready to oblige. North Texas and Austin officials have drafted lists of hundreds of projects that could begin construction within months, if the state receives its \$6 billion allotment of the funds.

President-elect Barack Obama is ready to provide Texas with additional funding, the state department of transportation has a wish list 853 projects long ready to build. Twenty-five percent of those are in North Texas. The state has divided ready-to-go projects into three-month, six-month and nine-month time periods. Michael Morris, director of transportation for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which has its own list of proposals, said if Congress passes a bill in January, ground could be broken as soon as April.

Some fear that the ready-to-go projects are not the long range ones experts say would do far more to solve Texas and the country's transportation problems, such as major urban transit expansions or relief for highly-congested freight routes that back up highways.

"The kinds of projects that are ready to go aren't the ones that have the most strategic value,"
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said U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters in an interview last week. "And while even those quick projects will create some jobs, the impact may be less than some expect. They won't bring the kind of long-term return more strategic spending would have."

N.C. DOT Lays Off Workers Pending Federal Stimulus

Asheville Citizen-Times, NC - Dec 9, 2008

RALEIGH - Layoffs have begun for temporary workers in the North Carolina Department of Transportation as the agency copes with federal funding cuts and the decline in tax revenues.

"The North Carolina Department of Transportation is having to lay off temporary workers in its field offices and take other measures, because of funding cutbacks on the federal level as well as a drop in collections from the state motor fuels tax and state sales tax on motor vehicles, the primary source of money for the department," said Gov. Mike Easley in a news release.

In the past month, 88 temporary hourly employees have been laid off, and hundreds more will lose their jobs in coming weeks, according to state officials. Hundreds of millions of dollars in highway projects are also expected to be postponed in the next month.

Gov. Easley traveled to Philadelphia last week to inform President-elect Barack Obama of North Carolina and other state's urgent need for an economic stimulus to fund infrastructure. "The state Transportation Department has more than \$5 billion worth of projects read to go today, throughout the state, if the money was available from a federal stimulus program," Easley said. "These are projects that will help North Carolina and work to revive our economy."

Illinois Gov. Sought Campaign Funds in Tollway Plan

TheNewspaper.com, DC - December 10, 2008

The governor of Illinois and his chief of staff were arrested this week under a five-year probe that includes charges for conspiring to commit fraud and soliciting bribes. The case around Gov. Rod Blagojevich and chief of staff John Harris has focused on the alleged attempt to sell President-elect Barack Obama's Senate seat.

More recent charges allege the governor's \$1.8 billion "Green Lane" tolling proposal which was centered on adding High Occupancy Toll lanes to the Illinois Tollway was a scheme to enrich his personal campaign contributors. Blagojevich reportedly sought contributions from an unnamed executive with a local concrete firm in exchange for contracts in the program.

Days before the governor announced a \$1.8 billion "Green Lane" tollway construction program on October 16, he privately tipped a fundraiser to the plan and said he expected a major highway contractor to raise \$500,000 for his campaign fund, according to a FBI recording. The plans, centered around the addition of High Occupancy Toll lanes to the Illinois Tollway, were approved by tollway directors Nov. 20. A spokesperson said this week they plan to move forward with the projects.



This whole story and what is going on here is unbelievable. Our industry just can't afford to have something like this happen with the stimulus money. It would be naïve to think that there aren't people out there who may try something inappropriate.
TW

Airlines Post Best On-Times Numbers Since 2003

The Dallas Morning News – December 10, 2008

The nation's largest airlines reported the best on time performance in five years in October, the U. S. Department of Transportation said this week, with 86 percent of flights arriving within 14 minutes of schedule. Cutbacks to flight schedules by most airlines has eased the burden on airports and air traffic control systems. Transportation Department data reports that 11.5 percent fewer flights were scheduled in October from the previous year by the 19 airlines.

The top performers were regional carrier Pinnacle Airlines Inc. with 90.7 percent of flights arriving on time, followed by Northwest Airlines Inc. with 90 percent, according to the department. Southwest Airlines finished in fourth place with 89.6 percent, and American Airlines, which has taken significant steps to improve its schedule reliability this fall, ranked 14th with 83.6 percent.

The October performance marked the best in the industry since October 2003. The move by most airlines to charge a fee for checked bags also appears to be improving lost luggage statistics, with a 34 percent drop from October 2007 and a 53 percent decline from October 2006. The 19 carriers reported 3.55 missing bags per 1,000 passengers in October of this year.



I know you feel like you were on most of the 20% of the flights that weren't on-time but this is an example of demand being brought in line with existing airport capacities. The fear is that this improvement will take the pressure off lawmakers and others who need to move projects ahead. The issue of better management of air travel including routing and airport capacity is still with us. TW

Toll Hike Critics Call for Turnpike Boycott

Boston Globe – December 10, 2008

A group called Stop the Pike Hike, which opposes the proposed toll increases on the Massachusetts Turnpike, is calling for its 6,000 members to boycott the road Tuesday, December 16--the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. By asking members to take neighborhood streets instead of the turnpike, the group hopes to show public officials the consequences of having increased traffic on local roadways, as well as lose toll revenue.

The boycott was quickly contested by Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and State Senator Anthony Petrucci, who warned that increased traffic could be a safety threat and disturb the quality of life in neighborhoods. Petrucci said he too opposes the toll hike, but a public debate would be more appropriate. The senator added that ongoing hearings at the capital are looking at other funding options, such as a gas tax proposal, so the rest of the state could share the cost.

Stop the Pike Hike director Spencer Kimball called the boycott the "least problematic way of trying to get our message across." He said the planned detour would represent just a fraction of what the Turnpike may lose if the hike is implemented, noting that city and state officials have made their own estimations predicting 60,000 drivers would stop using the roadway.



Why is it that those who oppose transportation issues or projects have such catchy slogans? "Stop the Pike Hike" is memorable and gets the message across. In 1997 when we were in the process of raising money for the I-15 project in Salt Lake City there was fear in the education community that funds would be diverted from their programs to build roads. One day the capital was filled with schoolchildren wearing t-shirts that had tire tracks across the back with the slogan, "Don't pave over me." Harsh, but effective. TW

Kansas Senate Leader wants Transportation

Forbes, NY - Dec 9, 2008

Senate leaders in Kansas want to pass a comprehensive transportation package next year, despite the dire financial situation of the state: the worst it has seen since the Great Depression. Senate head Steve Morris took the first step by moving Sen. Dwayne Umbarger from directing the Ways and Means Committee to taking charge of the Transportation Committee, which will draft any proposal for the after the Legislature assembles Jan. 12.

The existing transportation plan is set to expire next summer and Morris said a new one is needed, regardless of the \$141 million deficit facing the state's current budget. If adjustments are not made, that could grow to \$1 billion by the close of the next budget year on June 30, 2010.

"We obviously have very little money to do anything, but once it is in place that sends a message to the people, even if we have to start slow for the first couple of years," Morris said. "We may have to start slow and implement bigger projects down the road, but if that is the case, so be it. We don't want our contractors to get discouraged if there's no plan in place and start downsizing. We want them to be able to start participating."

State Pinch may stall \$5B in Projects

San Diego Union Tribune, CA - Dec 9, 2008

SACRAMENTO – The California Legislature's inability to close an overwhelming \$28 billion budget gap may force \$5 billion worth of infrastructure projects to stall, warned the state treasurer this week. The shaky financial state in California has resulted in investors refusing to buy bonds that were anticipated to supply more than \$660 million per month in project financing through the end of this year and well into next, according to state Treasurer Bill Lockyer's office.

"The result is that in nine days ... we'll be forced to start shutting down planned expenditures for highways, schools, flood control and other infrastructure projects," Lockyer told a joint session of

the Legislature. "It means that economic stimulus we all want, won't occur." Lockyer said the projects represent \$12.5 billion in lost revenue to private contractors and about 200,000 jobs. Some projects currently underway will be halted, while others will be delayed indefinitely.

Despite the grim outlook, lawmakers appeared no closer to a resolution this month than they were last month. Legislative leaders continued closed-door negotiations this week and both chambers will soon begin public budget hearings. Meanwhile, the deficit grows worse with each passing week. Finance Director Mike Genest warned that the failure to reach a compromise last month may have added \$2 billion to the problem. With little cash and few borrowing options remaining, the state may be unable to pay all of its bills within weeks.

Colorado Transit may see Quick Legislative Action

The Denver Post – December 10, 2008

The incoming speaker of the House in Colorado says he wants state investment in new transportation projects right away, which likely means lawmakers will consider ways to fund at least a portion of that investment without asking voters to approve. Rep. Terrance Carroll (D-Denver) said the need to invest in the state's transportation and boost the economy is too urgent to put off until next November.

"We need to exercise leadership from the legislative side," Carroll said in an interview this week. "... We need a proposal that has immediate impact that can get shovels turning the dirt right now." Governor Bill Ritter weighed in on the topic, saying a transportation funding proposal may have a rocky road at the ballot next year with the economic situation.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in both houses are working through the details of a widely agreed-upon plan to revive the state's transportation system and invest in the economy, which both need all the help they can get. Key lawmakers said an agreement has not been reached on what that proposal would look like.

"We need to exercise leadership from the legislative side." I couldn't have said it better myself. In some states, legislatures do lead in providing transportation funding. The Utah and Minnesota legislatures come to mind as particularly effective in this regard. TW

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