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## Proposal Offers Discount Transit on Red-Burn Days

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*Salt Lake Tribune* – February 5, 2008

*Utah* - Commuters in Utah could have a less costly way to work on red-burn days under a recent proposal to offer discounted transit on inversion-thick days. Republican Rep. Wayne Harper of West Jordan got the idea for his bill from Virginia's transit system, which offers free rides on yellow burn days. Harper thinks the discounted or free rides would cut traffic congestion and therefore air pollution.

Harper's bill would make bus and light rail rides free on red burn or high pollution days, and discounted on yellow burn days. The proposal could cut revenue for the Utah Transportation Authority by up to \$4 million if it passes.

## Missouri Bill would bring Tolls to I-70

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*Landline Magazine* – February 4, 2008

A Missouri lawmaker is seeking to eliminate barriers prohibiting toll roads and bridges in the state with a proposal in the Senate. Republican Sen. Matt Bartle, R-Lee's Summit, has proposed a bill that would enable the state Highways and Transportation Commission to finance, build and operate toll roads and bridges, particularly on I-70 between Kansas City and St. Louis.

Bartle has attempted legislation to bring tolls to the state for the past four years, but the committee has rejected each effort so far. The Senate Transportation Committee has been discussing this year's version, but has not yet voted on the measure. SB793 calls for drivers to pay \$5 to travel the length of the 250-mile highway through the state. An amendment to the state's constitution must also be passed to give the highway commission the necessary authority to use state funds to build toll roads, which is currently prohibited.

Even if the bills pass the legislature, an amendment to the constitution would require a public vote. Other obstacles include that on roads maintained by the state, there could be legislation on certain projects to use a tolling authority. On interstates, however, federal law prohibits instituting tolls on roadways that are currently free, unless the state requests permission from the FHWA to toll an interstate as a pilot project.

Highway officials have requested a tolling authority for the last six consecutive years, but lawmakers have never let it proceed to the ballot. Toll advocates have been working for years to bring tollways to Missouri, but voters rejected the option in 1970 and 1992, the last time it was on the ballot.

## Seattle Transit May get \$100M Boost

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*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* – February 6, 2008

Seattle's Sound Transit may be getting a \$100 million boost from the Bush Administration, under the President's 2009 budget plan announced this week. The budget for fiscal year 2009 allocates funding for the 3.2 mile University Link between downtown Seattle and the University of Washington, in an unprecedented single-budget allocation for the light rail project, Sound Transit officials said.

The money will allow groundbreaking to move forward on schedule in the fall, said Ric Ilginfritz, the executive director for Sound Transit's policy and public affairs. "It's tremendous news; this is absolutely what we'd hope for," Ilginfritz said. "It makes the north line viable ... and we'll be able to roll from construction of the south line right into construction of the north line."

Ilginfritz says the allocation is a vote of confidence for Sound Transit's hopes for a \$750 million Full Funding Grant Agreement from the Federal Transit Administration to finish the light rail line. The final decision on the grant is expected to be made by the FTA in late spring or early summer. Sound Transit plans to open its 15.6-mile south line between downtown Seattle and the Sea-Tac Airport next year.

## Fixing Virginia's Deficient Bridges: \$3.5 Billion

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*Richmond Times-Dispatch* – February 6, 2008

*Virginia* - Replacing all of the structurally-deficient bridges in Virginia would cost \$3.5 billion, the state's transportation department estimates – a number that rivals the agency's \$4 billion annual budget. With 1,746 bridges deemed structurally deficient, about 8.4 percent of the state's 20,838

bridges and culverts need replaced, said the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Virginians for Better Transportation, a transportation advocacy group, released a statement Tuesday calling on the General Assembly to "provide VDOT with sufficient funding to replace [or] repair our aging bridges."

The construction portion of VDOT's \$4 billion budget is \$1 billion, and VDOT plans to spend about \$150 million to maintain and repair bridges in the state, said Kendal R. Walus, VDOT's chief bridge engineer. VDOT officials report that the proportion of deficient bridges in the state has been slowly, but steadily, declining over the last 12 years, and the number is below the national average.

## Committee to Verify TxDOT Finances

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KXAN-TV, TX - Feb 6, 2008

*Texas* - The Senate Finance Committee in Texas is going to figure out for themselves just how much money the state department of transportation has, and whether or not the agency has enough money to complete projects in the Central Texas area, as TxDOT officials claim. Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst recently spoke out against the Texas Department of Transportation, questioning their numbers.

Projects around the state have been cut, and some current construction projects have been delayed because of a lack of funding. TxDOT says it does not have the money to pay for the projects and estimates a \$3.6 billion shortfall by 2015. Senators on the committee criticized TxDOT, saying that if officials knew a financial crisis was looming, they should have alerted lawmakers last legislative session.

Many senators have agreed that an audit is necessary to determine the actual financial situation in the department, with some accusing TxDOT of claiming to be short on cash as a tactic to build more toll roads. TxDOT officials said they would welcome an audit if the committee decides one is needed.



*This audit will prove that TxDOT has been accurate in stating the needs and articulating the shortfall. As to whether or not the legislature was "alerted" I suspect you can go find the presentations made by Mike Behrens and others from TxDOT during the last session and find ample "alerts" being given. I can't see a down side to this effort if it is done in good faith and with a sincere desire to find out what is going on. TW*

## Funds will Widen I-70, Improve Transit

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Associated Construction Publications, GA - Feb 5, 2008

*Frederick County, Md.* - The governor of Maryland has reaffirmed his commitment to relieve traffic congestion and improve transit in the state, saying the state plans to widen I-70 between MD 355 and Patrick Street, to break up one of the worst bottlenecks in Frederick County. Gov.

Martin O'Malley also announced that he plans to make a nearly \$100 million investment in the MARC Train system. Both projects are part of Maryland's six-year Consolidated Transportation Program.

The \$55 million I-70 widening project will add a lane in each direction from MD 355 to Patrick Street, as well as add and update ramps and make intersection improvements. MARC's Brunswick Line passengers will benefit from the governor's major investment of \$65 million in new rail cars and locomotives, \$13 million in improvements at Union Station in Washington, and \$13 million in track signal improvements.

The state is dedicating an additional \$56.8 million in capital funding to purchase buses and improve facilities for locally-operated transit systems. Local transit agencies can be considered for these funds through an annual application process with the Maryland Transit Administration.

## **Involuntary Airline Bumps Hits 11-Year High**

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*USA Today* – February 5, 2008

In 2007, U.S. airlines reached an 11-year high in the number of ticketed passengers that were involuntarily bumped from flights. The 18 largest airlines in the nation declined boarding to 63,878 passengers, or 1.12 per 10,000 passengers, according to a U.S. Department of Transportation report released Tuesday. Delta Airlines had the highest bump rate among traditional airlines in 2007, with 2.47 per 10,000 passengers.

In a controversial practice, airlines often sell more tickets than available seats on flights to offset probable no-shows. Airlines say this allows them to keep fares lower by filling more seats. But fuller than usual planes and frequent delays last year made it more difficult for airlines to find convenient alternatives for passengers on overbooked flights, said David Castelveter of trade group Air Transport Association.

The DOT says in 2007, 621,717 people voluntarily switched flights, often with an inducement such as a free trip or credit voucher. The federal government is considering making major changes to its rules regarding involuntary bumping, such as doubling the maximum compensation the airlines are required to pay, among other changes. The proposal would require airlines to give up to \$400 to passengers who reach their destination within two hours of schedule on domestic flights, or four hours for international flights. Longer delays would be compensated with up to \$800.

## **Speed Cameras Effective, even Outside Enforcement Zones**

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*PRNewswire News Release* – February 1, 2008

*ARLINGTON, Va.* – The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is releasing two new evaluations of the effectiveness of speed camera enforcement in Scottsdale, Arizona and Montgomery County, Maryland.

Before the city of Scottsdale kicked off a pilot speed-camera enforcement program, 15 percent of drivers were traveling faster than 75 mph on sections of a busy urban freeway with a 65 mph speed limit. Once the cameras were in place on Loop 101, the number of violators plunged to 1-2 percent. What's more, speed violations fell on the same freeway 25 miles outside the enforcement area. Surveys also indicate that speed cameras garnered the support of local drivers.

"These results show how the combination of highly visible warning messages and camera enforcement deters speed violations," says Richard Retting, Institute senior transportation engineer and the study's lead author. "The program wasn't about tickets. The goal was to drive down violations by sending a message that speeding is unacceptable. Scottsdale's program is one of the best examples we've seen of how to accomplish that."

Montgomery County, Maryland is using speed cameras to enforce limits of 35 mph or less in residential areas and school zones. Researchers measured speeds 6 months before and 6 months after camera enforcement began in May 2007 in this Washington, D.C. suburb. The proportion of vehicles going more than 10 mph faster than posted limits fell by 70 percent on roads where cameras were operational and 39 percent on roads with signs warning of enforcement but where cameras weren't yet in place.

An Institute survey 6 months after the kickoff found that 74 percent of county respondents considered speeding a problem on residential streets, 60 percent were aware of camera enforcement, and 62 percent favored it.

## **Proposal would Force State Workers to use Commuter Rail**

*Las Cruces Sun-News, NM - Feb 4, 2008*

**SANTA FE** - A New Mexico lawmaker is seeking to add a provision to the state's \$6 billion budget, forcing state employees to use the state's commuter rail system for government travel. The provision, added by the Senate Finance Committee, would ban the use of budget money for mileage reimbursements for state workers traveling in government vehicles between cities served by the Rail Runner.

The commuter rail line, which currently runs from Belen to Bernalillo, will extend to Santa Fe later this year under a \$400 million project. Senate Republican Whip Leonard Lee Rawson, the bill's sponsor, said taxpayers should not have to pay for state workers who should be riding the Rail Runner on state business. The proposed restriction would not apply to law enforcement or emergency vehicles.



*The idea sounds good on the surface, until you realize these same state employees will not have local transportation once at their destination. In addition, the extra time they will use to travel using Rail Runner will drain tax coffers each time a trip is made. Thinking this proposal through makes people realize the complexity of the overall system. A problem can't be solved by focusing on just one leg of a trip. A better solution would be not only to advance this proposal but also increase bus service to and from stations in these communities, offer "loaner" clean-fueled vehicles for local transportation, increase the frequency of service of Rail Runner plus other complementary measures. You have to deal with the big picture and not just one piece of*

## Defeat may lead to Detour for O.C. Tollway

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*Los Angeles Times* – February 8, 2008

Orange County toll officials are forging ahead despite a stinging rejection before the California Coastal Commission, which voted 8 to 2 against building the Foothill South tollway through San Onofre Beach. Thousands crowded at the Del Mar Fairgrounds Wednesday to hear 12 hours of testimony on the controversial tollroad that would run between San Diego and Orange counties, cutting into the eastern portion of the popular San Onofre Beach.

Commissioners ultimately decided that the roadway would violate environmental laws that regulate development along the California coastline. The tollway would have taken about 320 of the park's 2,100 acres, which is home to several endangered species, as well as a campground and archaeological sites. The estimated \$875 million Foothill South would be the final link in Orange County's toll road network, stretching 16 miles from Oso Parkway in Rancho Santa Margarita to I-5 at Basilone Road south of San Clemente.

"The news was disappointing," said Lance MacLean, a board chairman for the Transportation Corridor Agencies, which plans to appeal the commission's decision to the federal government. The toll road agency, which has spent years and tens of millions of dollars planning Foothill South, is also considering changing the route of the highway outside the jurisdiction of the Coastal Commission instead. "Of the 16 miles to complete the toll road," MacLean said, "only 2.2 miles are in the coastal zone. We can change the route, but that's just an idea, and of course, we will have to do studies."

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