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## Miami Airport makes Aviation History

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*Miami Herald* – April 8, 2009

*MIAMI* - Miami International Airport has become the first in the nation to begin using a new satellite-based air traffic control system which will be phased in throughout the nation. The first stage of the system was unveiled at MIA on Tuesday by Federal Aviation Administration officials, and could eventually replace conventional radar with the more precise satellite GPS signal for tracking aircraft.

The radar and radio tracking used for decades by pilots flying out of any major airport requires clearance for takeoff and the climb to cruising altitude from air traffic controllers. With this system, aircraft often roam along "airways" that are not the most direct path between two cities.

The new system, called NextGen or Next Generation, allows more precise tracking of aircraft, enabling pilots to travel more direct routes instead of the current roundabout high-altitude and radio beacon airways. FAA officials say the existing radar system will be gradually phased out over a period of decades after the national deployment of NextGen, with some remaining operational as systems backup.

Advocates of the satellite system say that in the future, pilots may not communicate with air traffic controllers for takeoff, climb and cruise authorizations, relying instead on text messages on cockpit computer screens sent by human controllers or pre-programmed into software connected to NextGen.

## Texas Bill Restricts, not Eliminate, Private Toll Roads

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*Texas* - New toll road guidelines approved this week by the Texas Senate extend the authority to start and lease the projects for six more years and make privatization efforts more suitable for transit work. With a 30-1 vote, the Senate sent the bill to the House, which would create a process for constructing toll roads throughout the state, while giving local tolling authorities the option to develop roadways first. The bill requires all public financing sources to be used up before turning the projects over to private groups.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Robert Nichols, R-Jacksonville, says it establishes protections for the public. "It is important to establish a process for building new roads, but private financing for transportation projects should only be used as a last resort," Nichols said in a written statement. "State and local entities will build and operate a road in the public's interest, not the shareholder's."

The measure also includes a provision that would require private contracts to contain a buy-back price if the state chooses to end the contract early. Existing Texas law requires the state to pay "fair market value" but does not clearly detail how this is determined, according to the Dallas Morning News.

## **Groups Challenge Virginia's \$11B I-81 Improvement Plan**

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*NBC 29 News* - April 7, 2009

*Virginia* - The \$11 billion plan to widen Interstate 81 is going to court after several groups filed suit against the Federal Highway Administration, saying the agency did not fully consider all other alternatives. Methods to improve the interstate through the Shenandoah Valley will now be decided by a judge as attorneys on both sides of the debate made arguments in federal court this week.

The Valley Conservation Council is among several groups that filed the suit, saying the FHWA is working with tunnel vision. One possible alternative is the ongoing multi-state study of I-81 freight rail, which could include improvements to the Norfolk Southern line worth \$4 billion.

Highway officials argue that even if rail pulled all commercial vehicles off the interstate, I-81 would still need widening. The two sides agree that short-term improvements to the interstate can continue. "They're already underway," said John Eckman with the Council. "There's nothing about this lawsuit that we're proposing would in any way slow that sort of improvement down." A judge will make a ruling on the case within the next 60 days.

## **Interior Secretary: Wind Power could Replace Coal**

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*Business Lexington* - April 8, 2009

*WASHINGTON* - Windmills off the U.S. east coast could eventually replace the need for coal-fired power plants in the country, according to a speech by U.S. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar

announcing a new direction in energy policy this week. Salazar said the technology required to make this switch is already available, although coal industry leaders doubted his claims, which they also say could devastate the economy in coal mining communities.

"The idea that wind energy has the potential to replace most of our coal-burning power today is a very real possibility," he said. "It is not technology that is pie-in-the-sky; it is here and now."

One of Salazar's key roles is to forge a renewable energy future for the nation. The U.S. has 27 new wind energy manufacturing facilities at work, and 85,000 jobs have been created in wind energy, and almost as many in the solar industry. Energy independence could also alleviate geopolitical pressures, as Salazar said the nation's current need for imported oil serves to finance "both sides of the war on terror."



*I realize this isn't a transportation story but I feel there is a principle worth noting. First, I am all in favor of alternative energy production, more sustainable systems and less dependence on foreign oil. However, the premise that the US could replace all coal-fired plants with wind farms off of the eastern seaboard is unrealistic. It sounds good and people get excited about the prospects of something so appealing. Most of the available off-shore wind capacity is in "deep water" (over 200 feet) and there is no large scale development of this sort in the world. Consider also that the Secretary was talking about total capacity when he should have discounted that capacity to what experts say is the more realistic range of 30-40% since the wind doesn't blow all the time. There isn't room here to present all the numbers that show this to be impossible. I also suspect that people who live on the coast will have something to say about looking out their windows at endless acres of wind farm (the NIMBY actor).*

*Public officials do a disservice to when they make statements that can never come true; this also applies to transportation. We need to be careful about raising expectations for existing or future transportation systems which are not possible no matter how appealing they might be. Let's not let our passions cloud reality. TW*

## Illinois Dedicates \$900M to Chicago Transit Projects

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*Progressive Rail Roading - April 7, 2009*

*SPRINGFIELD, Ill.* - Chicago area mass transit will receive \$900 million in mass transit funding under a spending package signed by new Gov. Pat Quinn to get construction workers back to work.

The \$3 billion statewide capital improvement plan also included the restoration of a \$40 million annual commitment for Chicago road-related projects which ended under former Gov. Rod Blagojevich. The plan will be financed with bonds to be retired by state revenues.

The transit funding includes \$495.9 million for the Chicago Transit Authority; \$290.7 million earmarked for Metra; \$68.4 million for Pace; and \$45 million for paratransit.

Additionally, Quinn signed a statewide construction package allowing the state to borrow \$2 billion for road and bridge construction and another \$1 billion for mass transit work. The funding

will be repaid from the state's road fund and bigger general funds.

## Atlanta Transit Board Pushes Special Session

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*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* – April 9, 2009

*Georgia* - Atlanta's transit system is urging the governor to hold a special legislative session so the agency can avoid cutting service down to six days a week. Gov. Sonny Perdue disagreed with the agency, saying although he is concerned about a potential cut to the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority services, he wants to explore alternatives to solving the system's problems.

"Certainly the governor can call a special session, but this is not the first time somebody's bill has not passed and they've run to the governor's office to ask for a special session," Perdue told reporters. "We will have to look at a lot of things. We will do our best not to call a special session."

The state Legislature left hanging the issue of allowing MARTA officials to access their own money when it adjourned last week, and also failed to resolve transportation funding legislation. The transit bill would have removed the state restriction prohibiting MARTA from using the \$65 million it has sitting in capital reserves.

## Drivers Hit with Toll Hike

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*Forbes* – April 6, 2009

*ORLANDO, Fla.* – Tolls went up around Central Florida this week in a largely unpopular quarter hike approved by the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority. Despite the struggling economy and a protest asking motorists to boycott all toll booths by a group called "Ax the Tax," the increase went into effect Sunday, impacting 75% of the authority's ramps and toll plazas.

The Expressway Authority rejected a proposal in February to delay the increase, saying the higher tolls are necessary to pay for future construction and protect the authority's credit rating. Officials from the authority said the economy has left fewer drivers on the road, and pointed out they haven't raised tolls in the past 19 years.