











Editor's Note: One of our vigilant readers, Bob Close, noted that Governor Jay Nixon is from Missouri and not Illinois as was stated in one of our stories last week.

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Recovery Act Crosses 6,000th Highway Project Mark

PressZoom; FHWA Press Release – August 4, 2009

WASHINGTON – This week the widening of congested U.S. 60 – or Grand Avenue – northwest of downtown Phoenix became the 6,000th highway project funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

"This marks a major milestone," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "This important project will improve safety and reduce traffic in and around Phoenix. It will also, like the thousands that came before it, put people back to work."

The \$44.5 million project will widen the route between State Route 303 and 99th Avenue, which serves an estimated 45,000 vehicles daily, from four lanes to six. In addition, intersections and medians will be improved, and turn lanes will be built at intersections. When completed, the project will greatly relieve one of Phoenix's most congested corridors and also help reduce greenhouse gases in the area.

Of the nearly \$27 billion available for highway projects through the Recovery Act, Arizona's share is \$520.9 million. To date, Arizona has funded 135 projects totaling \$307.8 million. Nationwide,

states have funded more than 2,400 projects for more than \$17 billion.



The states have really stepped up and done their part to move ARRA money to get projects under contract. Not every project is to everyone's liking and there are critics about the money allocation between rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, of the \$787 billion appropriated through the stimulus package, state DOTs have clearly been the most aggressive in getting the money doing what it was intended to do. TW

Bloomberg Proposes Free Crosstown Buses

The New York Times – August 3, 2009

New York - The notoriously slow crosstown buses in New York City take so long to travel around the city that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority should stop fare collection altogether so passengers can load and unload more quickly, Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed this week in his re-election plan that calls for bold mass transit reform.

"Plain and simple: the M.T.A. needs to do more. Much more," the mayor said Monday. "Our mass transit system is far behind." Bloomberg's plan is based on the premise that most cross-town bus riders are taking the subway or another local bus to complete their trip.

The mayor, seeking a third term in the November election, has very little influence over the M.T.A., controlling only 4 of the 17 votes on the authority board. Bloomberg's 33-point proposal for the city to assert a greater role in the authority spans buses, subways, ferries, roads and the authority's operations comes as the M.T.A. faces steep financial pressure. The authority recently raised fares and tolls, increasing the base subway and bus fare to \$2.25.

"Any loss in revenue will likely be offset by the gain in travel times, which may reduce operating costs by allowing the authority to run fewer buses," according to the Bloomberg campaign. If letting passengers ride for free proved successful, "the authority should expand it to other appropriate cross-town routes."

Study: N.J. Mass Transit Falls Behind Population Growth

Associated Press – August 6, 2009

New Jersey - Mass transit in New Jersey is failing to follow jobs and population to the suburbs that have seen the most employment and population growth, according to a report released by a transit advocacy group this week. The Tri-State Transportation Campaign study concluded that many of those counties lack convenient access to rail and bus service, forcing more people to drive to work.

"Some of the counties experiencing the fastest population and employment growth in the state, such as Somerset, Ocean and Warren, have the least transit service," the report said, while noting that the miles traveled on transit service statewide doubled compared to miles traveled by car over a ten year period beginning in 1997.

The group hopes the findings will encourage lawmakers to find new revenue sources to buoy up the state Transportation Trust Fund, which pays for projects to improve transit service but could run out of money by 2011.

NJ Transit will receive \$424 million from the federal economic stimulus package to fund 15 projects to improve riders commute and expand service to new areas.

Senate Tentatively Approves Transit Sales Tax Option

News & Observer – August 5, 2009

The North Carolina Senate has tentatively approved a measure to allow mass transit expansions in two of the state's busiest metro areas. The state Senate voted 37-9 Wednesday to advance local option legislation allowing six urban counties to pay for transit improvements with a half-cent sales tax increase, upon voter approval.

Supporters of the bill say it would jump-start a 25-year regional plan to add 300 buses and build a 56-mile light rail link between Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. The state's other 94 counties could raise sales taxes by a quarter-cent to the sales tax rate and vehicle registration fees would be boosted \$2. The bill is expected to go up for a final vote later this week.

Cleanest Cars may be Exempt from London Congestion Charge

Environmental Transport Association – August 6, 2009

London officials are considering exempting the least-polluting vehicles from the city's congestion charge following a plan review. Drivers are charged the U.S. equivalent of about \$13.50 per day (£8) to enter the congestion charge zone, except for drivers of electric and hybrid cars, which are exempt on environmental grounds.

However, an estimated 14,000 drivers of gasoline and diesel vehicles still pay the fee, even though their vehicles produce equal or lower emission than hybrids. London's top ten green cars for 2009 includes three hybrid vehicles, and seven conventionally-powered cars that produce as little or less CO₂, yet still have to pay.

"The inconsistencies of the London road-user charging scheme stem from an identity crisis; at present it is not clear whether it is a congestion charge or a tax on emissions," said a spokesperson for the Environmental Transport Association (ETA).

The consideration to increase vehicle exemptions is part of an overall review of the congestion charge. London Mayor Boris Johnson is also looking into raising the cost of entering the congestion charge zone during peak hours, while charging less during other times of the day. No changes will be made to the system until spring 2010 at the earliest.



The ETA spokesperson asks the operative question: "Is it a congestion charge or a tax on emissions?" If it is a congestion charge, all vehicles should be treated equally regardless of fuel or emissions profile. If an emissions charge, that should be the criteria. TW

Michigan Bills would Reduce Congestion, Boost County Road Funds

Land Line Magazine – August 5, 2009

Michigan's House Transportation Committee is looking at two bills to reduce gridlock caused by specific fender-benders and give counties an alternative funding source. One measure, in the event of a car crash, would require drivers – or licensed passengers – to move their vehicles from traffic lanes as long as the vehicle was still drivable and no serious injuries had occurred. Drivers failing to move vehicles would be fined \$105.

The bill's supporters say studies have shown more than 20 percent of crashes are secondary crashes that occur because drivers are reacting to an existing accident scene or because of a gridlock situation.

A separate bill to supplement road funding options for local governments would repeal a ban preventing counties from using general property tax revenue for road construction and maintenance. If approved, the measure would allow counties with surplus money in their general fund to use part of the revenue for road work.



In another part of this story a bill was introduced to reduce fines for overweight trucks to ease the financial pressures on the trucking industry. Amazing. Let's encourage violating regulations in the name of easing the financial burden one group in society is feeling. I don't mean to sound harsh but where does such logic end? Let's reduce the fines for speeding since those who speed are likely to be suffering financially in this recession. TW

Macquarie Official says U.S. Sale Rumors are False

Land Line Magazine – August 5, 2009

Rumors that toll road giant Macquarie Infrastructure Group may sell some of its U.S. assets, including the Indiana Toll Road, as recently reported by several news reports, are incorrect, reports company officials. The speculation by several financial news sources about the possible sale of U.S. assets was sparked by a July 8 statement by Macquarie, although assets were not specifically mentioned.

"MIG is not in the market pursuing a sales process for any of its U.S. assets, including the Indiana Toll Road," Macquarie spokesman Alex Doughty said. "Speculation suggesting otherwise is simply incorrect."

Australia-based Macquarie Infrastructure Group operates the Dulles Greenway in Virginia and the South Bay Expressway in Southern California's San Diego region. As the largest global toll road operator, Macquarie has also partnered with Cintra of Spain on other North American ventures, including the Indiana Toll Road, Chicago Skyway and the 407 Express Toll Route in Canada.

La. Pushes for New Orleans-Baton Rouge Passenger Rail Service

USA Today – August 6, 2009

BATON ROUGE – Louisiana officials are working on plans to request \$300 million in federal funding to launch a passenger rail service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Past attempts at similar proposals have been unsuccessful, including two tries following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Officials are still looking for a way for the state to fund \$18 million annually in operations costs for the rail service under the current plans. Optimistically, top state officials say rail service could begin operations by 2013. State transportation official Tom Atkinson said Wednesday that ridership levels should sustain the service and provide growth opportunities.