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Maryland Announces ICC Tolling Plan

The Baltimore Sun – September 23, 2009

Maryland – Toll rates of up to 35 cents per mile could be paid by drivers using the Intercounty Connector when the first phase opens next year, according to a tolling plan released by the Maryland Transportation Authority on Wednesday. The state proposal projected the average maximum toll would be \$2.35 on the new highway between Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

The state plans to set tolls at levels to keep the highway congestion free by sending some east-west traffic onto local free roads. The MTA board's plan reported the cost to travel the entire 18.8-mile of the six-lane highway could be up to \$6.15 during peak travel times. Large trucks and tractor-trailers--projected to make up 7 percent of all ICC traffic--would be charged between 60 cents and \$2.63 per mile, depending on the time of day. Traveling the length of the highway during peak hours would be a maximum of \$36.85.

The new highway linking I-270 in Montgomery County with the I-95-U.S. 1 corridor in Prince George's County will be the first toll road in Maryland to collect all fees electronically at regular highway speeds and the first to adjust toll rates based on the time of day, the state said. The first 5.65-mile segment between Georgia Avenue and Shady Grove (I-370) is planned to open next fall, and the project will be fully completed in spring 2012.

Tracking Stimulus Spending Competition

NPR – September 23, 2009

SEATTLE - A website for citizens to track spending of billions of stimulus dollars is giving the government-run Recovery.gov a run for its money. The similarly named Recovery.com is reportedly more up-to-date in its tracking of stimulus spending, and even provides information the government will not publish until October, with data that provides a preview in the progress of stimulus spending.

The dot-com site is run by Seattle-based Onvia, which collects and sells government procurement data, including the spending by all levels of government – state, county, school districts and so on.

"[We track] millions and millions of transactions that are happening around the company all the time," said Eric Gillespie, Onvia's chief information officer. "Whether you are selling paving services for highways, or you sell copy paper, wireless routers, we let you know when someone at any level of government wants to buy what you're selling."

When the federal government rejected its offer to sell its tracking services for stimulus spending, Onvia went into competition by purchasing the domains and) opening Recovery.com and Recovery.org. Onvia's version of the government's tracking website looks "eerily similar" to the dot-gov site, breaking down spending by each state with clickable maps. Recovery.com allows public comments, and Onvia reports that 13 of the 15 most frequent visitors to the site are on government computers.

Gillespie says the early data gives unique insight, such as local governments are getting deals with supply costs down and fierce competition; bids are 16 percent lower than usual. Onvia's data also reveals that the money is being spent somewhat slowly, with only \$26 billion in capital contracts awarded as of Sept. 14, representing a small step in the effort toward a national economic recovery.



Onvia is well known in the industry as a provider of valuable information that helps firms compete in an increasingly challenging market. It is no surprise the private sector can do this better than the government. The irony of this report is that government employees are using the site with such frequency instead of their own site.
TW

Fairfax Objects to Sharing Toll Dollars

Fairfax County Times – September 22, 2009

Virginia - Officials in Fairfax are protesting a new proposal to broaden the interpretation of how to spend revenue from the Dulles Toll Road. A letter from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors stated their opposition to using toll revenue to fund widening Route 606 in Loudoun County, and requested official clarification of the "Dulles corridor" for the purposes of toll revenue spending.

"The bottom line is that revenue from the tolls should not be used as a piggy bank for projects outside the corridor," board Chairwoman Sharon Bulova said, regarding the board's decision to send a strongly worded letter to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. The supervisors anticipated the MWAA proposal to raise Dulles Toll Road user fees to help fund the \$5.25 billion

Metro rail extension to the airport and also objected to airport authority plans to use toll revenue to fund one-third of the \$2 million engineering study for the Route 606, otherwise known as the Loudoun County Parkway.

"This improvement is in Loudoun County and I don't think revenue collected in Fairfax should go across the county line," said Hunter Mill supervisor Cathy Hudgins, who represents much of the area surrounding the Dulles Toll Road.



Perish the thought that revenues collected in one jurisdiction might cross into another. What about fuel tax revenues that go to another state in the donor donee agreement? How about my property taxes that pay for other people's kids in the elementary school down the street where my kids haven't gone in years? All these are "systems": revenues generated finance the "system" which extends beyond the borders of Fairfax County. TW

High-Speed Rail Endangered like California Condors

NBC Bay Area - September 22, 2009

California - The planned high-speed rail line connecting the Bay Area and Southern California has the support of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger along with a billion-dollar-plus request for stimulus funding. Last fall state voters approved both a \$9 billion bond issue for high-speed trains and a designated route. The project is also arguably farther along in planning for high-speed rail with a decade of design and engineering work completed.

One of the biggest roadblocks now may be the state agencies competing with "shovel ready" proposals in the Northeast regions of California. Also, despite the Governor's request for over \$1 billion, and the state's attempt at getting \$8 billion to help pay the \$40 billion projected cost, the plans could be completely derailed by Atherton resident's push to protect themselves from "noise" and "traffic."

Another obstacle that could ruin the state's chances at a hefty federal cash return is the Transbay Joint Powers Authority's demands for a stop near Market Street instead of the current Caltrain terminal at Fourth and King near the ballpark. These attempts by the Transbay authority and NIMBYs near the Peninsula may derail federal funding requests, but the high-speed train will still link the state's two mega-regions to create a major economic force.

U.S. DOT Awards \$100M in Green Transportation Grants

U.S. DOT Press Release - September 21, 2009

ATLANTA - The Obama Administration this week announced \$100 million in Economic Recovery Act funding for 43 transit agencies pursuing cutting-edge environmental technologies to help reduce global warming, lessen America's dependence on oil and create green jobs. Among the projects funded under the competitive bidding, Alabama will replace gasoline and diesel buses with electric hybrids; Massachusetts will construct wind energy generation turbines and Vancouver, Washington, will install solar panels at transit facilities.

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The 43 winning proposals were submitted by transit agencies from across the country as part of a nationwide competition for \$100 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. Selection criteria included a project's ability to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and provide a return on investment. The Federal Transit Administration reviewed more than \$2 billion in applications for these funds.

"These grants will put Americans to work now while improving our environment in the future," said FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff. "The transit industry continues to be at the forefront of reducing pollution and creating a cleaner, safer environment for our nation."

Transit agencies began submitting their proposals after the FTA announced rules for the Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction (TIGGER) grant program as part of the Recovery Act last March. The U.S. Department of Transportation is making \$48.1 billion available for highway, transit, bridge, rail, shipyard and airport construction and repairs nationwide. Of that, \$26.5 billion already has been obligated to fund more than 8,500 approved projects in 55 U.S. States and Territories.

Sweden's Congestion Charge Cuts Waiting Time in Half

IBM Press Release – September 23, 2009

STOCKHOLM – The congestion charge in Stockholm has cut waiting times for the morning commute by 50%, reports IBM, which created the Stockholm Congestion Charging System. City traffic is down by 18% and CO2 emissions in the inner city have been cut by between 14 and 18 percent, according to the results of the latest study on the system by the Stockholm City Traffic authorities.

In addition, the number of "green", tax-exempt vehicles has almost tripled, with the study showing that the congestion charging system the most influential factor in the decision to choose a "green" car. The number of commuters on public transport has increased by around seven percent or 60 000 passengers per day. The Stockholm system is the largest of its kind in Europe and was implemented in August 2007, following a successful pilot program.

"It is quite clear that the positive effects of the congestion charging system are continuing. Reducing traffic volumes, decreasing CO2 emissions and improving accessibility is bringing significant benefits," said Ulla Hamilton, Vice Mayor of Stockholm city responsible for traffic and environment. "It is also satisfying to see that the retail business in the city has not suffered as a result of the congestion charging system."

The congestion charge is a national tax expected to generate \$84 million (dollars) in 2010, which will be returned to the Stockholm region for investment in traffic infrastructure.

Toll Opponent Runs for Texas Governor

San Antonio Express-News – September 24, 2009

Texas - A rancher and staunch toll road opponent has announced his gubernatorial candidacy, vowing to eradicate the governor's tolling efforts if elected. Hank Gilbert of East Texas is a strong toll road opponent and on the board of directors of Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom, or TURF, founded by toll critic Terri Hall. Gov. Rick Perry spokesman Mark Miner said Gilbert is criticizing an issue both supported and being pushed by the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority.

"Once again, he's criticizing something the local officials want without coming up with solutions to move the 1,000 people a day coming to Texas," Miner said. "What are his transportation ideas? It's easy to criticize, but what are his ideas to address the infrastructure needs of the state?"

Terri Hall and others from TURF and the San Antonio Toll Party stood behind Gilbert during his press conference announcing his candidacy. Hall said her groups' official position is that they support "anyone but Rick Perry," but they "love it" that Gilbert is running. Hall, a Republican, said she believes Gilbert has crossover appeal. "What I'm seeing is that people are just fed up with career politicians," she said. "I think we do need to look at him as a serious candidate."