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Montgomery County Council Backs Light Rail

Washington Business Journal – November 17, 2009

Maryland - The Montgomery County Council in Maryland has endorsed building a light rail line and adding two reversible toll lanes on I-270 for the proposed 14-mile Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). The group voted Tuesday, becoming the most recent jurisdiction to decide how to relieve congestion on the crowded corridor.

The council had been debating the light rail or bus rapid transit option since the summer, and ended up split 6-3 on Tuesday's decision. A Nov. 5 study by the Maryland Transit Administration reported that a bus rapid transit system would cost an estimated 532.6 million while light rail would cost up to \$999 million.

The state may end up seeking funding for three major transit proposals simultaneously – the CCT, the Purple line in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, and the Red Line in Baltimore. State officials have been studying possible ways to relieve congestion on I-270 and Route 15, key connectors to the Capital Beltway in the area, for years. More than \$4 billion worth of proposals including widening I-270, adding toll lanes or creating a bus or light rail line.

Dutch Approve "Pay-as-You-Go" Tax on Driving

Radio Netherlands – November 17, 2009

AMSTERDAM – The Dutch government has approved a "green" road tax to charge drivers by the

kilometer (mile) beginning in 2012 in an effort to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent and halve congestion in the Netherlands. Singapore is currently the only other country that has implemented a similar plan for charging according to the amount of travel.

Instead of an annual road tax on their cars, drivers will be charged the equivalent of 7-cents per mile, using a GPS monitoring system to track how many miles are driven and when and where, according to a statement by the transport ministry. The GPS systems installed in cars will track the vehicle's movements and send the data to a central billing agency which will deduct the money from the drivers' bank account. To address privacy concerns over data protection, the information will not be stored.

When the new plan is implemented in 2012, new car prices will fall by up to 25-percent, as the purchase tax and road tax are abolished, which equal more than \$900 per year for a mid-sized car. The charge per mile will vary on the type of car, with more fuel-efficient models charged less than gas-guzzlers. It will also be more expensive to drive during rush hour. The tax will rise every year until 2018 – when it will reach 16 U.S. cents per mile for the average mid-sized car – and can be adjusted if it fails to alter traffic patterns.

The bill still needs the backing of parliament before becoming law. "The goal is a different manner of paying for mobility that is more fair. Not paying more, but paying differently, with a positive income effect for most households," Traffic Minister Camiel Eurlings said Friday. The ministry expects fatal accidents to fall by 7 percent because of the lower traffic volumes and possibly fewer stressed drivers.

West Virginia Lawmakers Pass Gas Tax Measure

Wtop.com – November 16, 2009

CHARLESTON, W. Va. – West Virginia legislators have concluded the fourth special session of the year Friday afternoon with the approval of the governor's proposed gas tax changes. The fight over the state gas tax dragged the special session, scheduled to end Thursday, into a fourth day. The debate was over Gov. Joe Manchin's proposal to freeze the motor vehicle tax rate to prevent a projected 3-cent-per-gallon decrease scheduled to go into effect next year, and prevent a 5-cent-per-gallon decrease set for 2013.

Manchin's fellow Democrats helped pass the gas tax measure, 64-23, which will limit changes to the part of the gas tax that varies annually with wholesale prices. Republicans criticized the measure, saying it would amount to tax increases, although a bipartisan debate ensued over whether motorists would notice any difference at the pumps.

Since the state maintains about 90 percent of roadways, supporters maintain the gas tax measure is the only way to insure the state can continue doing that. A companion bill earmarked \$27 million for the state's secondary roads.

Idaho Transportation Department Names New Director

AASHTO News Release – November 19, 2009
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BOISE, Idaho - The Idaho Transportation Board announced Thursday that Brian W. Ness has been selected as director of the Idaho Department of Transportation. Ness, who holds a bachelor's of science degree and a master's degree in public administration, was chosen from a group of 12 finalists, assembled during a nationwide search. Ness will begin his new job on January 11, 2010.

Ness, a 30-year veteran of the Michigan DOT, said, "I am looking forward to the challenges that await me in serving the citizens of Idaho. Between now and January, I will be developing relationships with the ITD team, the Governor's staff, and the Legislature as we move the department to the next level." As Michigan DOT Administrator, Ness was responsible for helping the department meet its strategic planning and quality improvement goals.



Congratulations to Brian on his appointment. This is an exciting time for Idaho with many challenges waiting his arrival. Governor Otter has established The Governor's Task Force on Modernizing Transportation Funding to look at their shortfall and needs. I have been asked to make a couple of presentations to them on December 2nd. It will be an interesting discussion. TW

Honolulu signs \$483M Rail Contract

Honolulu Star-Bulletin – November 18, 2009

Hawaii – Honolulu officials have signed a formal agreement to begin construction on the first six miles of the city's \$5.3 billion rail project. Mayor Mufi Hannemann said the \$483 million contract signed with contractor Kiewit Pacific Co. means the general excise tax revenue raised for the project cannot be used by state legislators trying to balance the state's \$1 billion budget deficit. State tax officials reported collecting some \$354 million in revenues from the general excise tax increase on Oahu as of July.

Planned to eventually stretch from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center, the project is currently awaiting state and federal approval on its environmental impact statement. Hannemann said he has not received any indication that there is any problem with the city's environmental impact statement.

The Hannemann administration planned to issue a request for proposals this week for the second phase – a 3.9-mile stretch from Pearl Highlands Shopping Center to Aloha Stadium, scheduled to begin construction in 2011. The administration also signed an agreement this week with labor unions to guarantee no work slowdowns or stoppages, which Hannemann said will also help ensure the use of local labor. The project will create an estimated 4,000 construction jobs and 10,000 other related new jobs, according to the mayor's office.

Government Wastes Over \$98B in Tax Dollars

ABC News – November 18, 2009

WASHINGTON – Almost \$100 billion in taxpayer dollars was wasted by the federal government

last year in improper payments to individuals, organizations and contractors. With a \$26 billion increase over the previous year, much of the money wasted by government agencies was on questionable claims for tax credits and Medicare benefits.

The government financial report released Tuesday said \$98 billion, or 5 percent, of spending in federal programs in fiscal year 2009 were improper. This was a 36 percent increase over the \$72 billion in improper payments from 2008. Officials attributed this jump to changes in how to define improper spending as well as an increase to overall spending because of the recession.

President Barack Obama said he plans to sign an executive order within the week to combat this government waste, and boost transparency, increase accountability and create new incentives for compliance. The executive order is expected to mandate each agency have a website for public access and report information on improper payments. Each agency will also be required to designate a Senate-confirmed appointee to be accountable to the President on meeting goals for decreasing improper payments.



While this story isn't specific to transportation, it seemed relevant for us today. I wish I felt confident that a Senate-confirmed appointee and a website were the answers to stopping the bleeding on \$98 billion a year. What we could do with \$98 billion in transportation!!! TW

Gov. says Texas needs to "Raise Dollars" for Roads

The Dallas Morning News – November 17, 2009

Texas – Governor Rick Perry said at a stop in Dallas this week that more money needs to be raised for road projects in the state.

"One of the problems is that we do not have the dollars that we need to build all the transportation infrastructure needs that we have," Perry said at the Conrad High School in Dallas Monday. "So hopefully when we come back in 2011, both the citizens and their elected officials will come to a stronger realization that we're going to have to expand our ability to raise some dollars to build the roads so that you don't have the strangulation in places along the I-35 corridor."

Perry, a strong advocate of toll roads, said the delegation in Washington should bring more tax dollars to the state for transportation projects. Governor spokesman Mark Miner said the governor was not referring to a gas tax increase to pay for the roads.

Kansas Panel looks at Road Funding Options

Land Line Magazine – November 18, 2009

Kansas – A legislative group in Kansas is considering options to fund a statewide, multi-year transportation improvement plan, including possibly increasing fuel taxes and fees to generate revenue. The Special Committee on Transportation is looking at replacing the current 10-year,

\$13 billion transportation program that recently ended with options that could possibly raise an additional \$3 billion to \$6 billion over the next decade.

Removing the sales tax exemption on motor fuels could generate an estimated \$3 billion over the next ten years. Nine states apply sales tax to fuel purchases in the U.S. The legislators are also looking at increasing the per-gallon tax rates on fuel and boosting the vehicle registration fees.

The panel is expected to finalize their recommendations by the end of this year, so the full legislature can analyze the plan during the regular session that begins in mid-January.