



Editor's Note:

Last week we included an article entitled, "Auto-to-Transit Shift Continues amid Falling Gas Prices" (http://tomwarnereport.com/twr/twr_v6n4.html#a6) where a 108 billion mile drop in VMT in the first 11 months of last year was reported. The article also stated that transit ridership was up 5% nationwide. The author of the article seemed to allude that there was a straight across transfer of passenger miles traveled diverted from highways to those carried by transit systems. We don't "fact check" everything that gets printed in newspapers around the country; however the actual information published by FHWA (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/pressroom/fhwa0905.htm>) shows 13 months of consecutive decline in VMT for a total of 112 billion less VMT.

While it is true that some people have transferred from passenger vehicle trips to transit systems it is erroneous to assume that all VMT reductions result in a direct shift. A 5% increase in transit ridership is a wonderful achievement which I hope will continue. However, that noteworthy increase is a relatively small overall number and represents only a fraction of the decreased passenger miles traveled.

A major share of this VMT reduction is no doubt the result of fewer trips, more carpooling, walking, use of bicycles and telecommuting. For example, the State of Utah now has a four-day workweek for state employees, causing an immediate reduction in VMT for that employee base. Virtually none of those related VMT transferred to transit. I am sure we will see clarifying studies and research on this topic subject in the future. It will be interesting to see how it all shakes out. For now, let's celebrate increased transit ridership but not let euphoria create an inaccurate picture that might lead to inappropriate strategies or policy decisions. TW

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New Florida Law Bills Traffic Violators to Bolster Budget

Land Line Magazine – February 3, 2009

Florida - Traffic violators in Florida will pay extra to help bridge a \$2.3 billion budget gap, according to a new law approved by lawmakers in a special budget-cutting session in January. The fine for all traffic tickets will increase by \$10, while speeders will pay an additional \$25, and judges are prohibited from waiving fines. The law also eradicates the 18 percent discount for offenders who attend traffic school.

The extra funding will raise an estimated \$16 million this year and \$63 million in 2010. The only downside to the new law is that none of the revenue will go for transportation. Instead, it will create a fund to pay prosecutors and public defenders. Critics said the new law may motivate officers to issue more warnings to cash-strapped motorists instead of the pricey tickets, and they questioned whether the punishment fits the crime.

Base fines for driving 15 to 19 mph over the speed limit will increase from \$125 to \$150. Speeding 20 to 29 mph over the speed limit will now cost \$175, up from \$150. The base fine for all moving and nonmoving violations, such as failure to buckle up and running a red light, will increase by \$10.

Maine Inches Closer to Fuel Surcharge Legislation

Land Line – February 3, 2009

Maine - Corrective legislation to prevent fuel surcharges from ending up in the wrong pockets in the freight chain is just around the corner in Maine, according to an OOIDA member from the state. Larry Sidelinger, OOIDA member and owner of Yankee Pride Transport, said he has had positive meetings with lawmakers and Maine Gov. John Baldacci on the issue.

State Sen. Elizabeth Schneider, D-Penobscot County, is reportedly planning to file legislation that will provide transparency and disclosure of motor carrier fuel costs. Schneider sponsored one of several bills approved in 2008 to provide relief for struggling logging truckers.

"We'll take our victories in small doses and keep moving forward and see where we go with it," Sidelinger said. "We've got a dialogue and this has all come over the fuel going up last year." He is encouraging truckers to push for pass-through standards with their lawmakers at the state level in Maine and at the federal level.

Texas Senator Lays out Transportation Priorities

The Dallas Morning News – February 3, 2009

Texas - A Dallas Senator is working to pass a constitutional amendment to end or start a systematic reduction in the diversion of gas tax dollars for non-transportation purposes – a move that he says will have significant support from the governor and the leaders of both Legislative

houses. In a highly anticipated letter to his colleagues, Sen. John Carona said he plans to restore as much of the \$1.5 billion diverted every two years as possible in this session. A bill already filed in the Senate would restore a meager \$150 million a year.

Carona has other plans for transportation as well. He hopes to scale back TxDOT's 14,000-employee workforce, "modestly index" the gas tax to inflation and issue the maximum amount of debt the agency can – in that order. The senator also supports "less desirable" options to boost transportation funding, including traditional toll roads and private toll roads, with the long term toll contracts that make the latter successful.

"Given our enormous funding needs, I do not believe we should eliminate this last set of mechanisms unless we are prepared to replace their revenue streams by materially increasing the gas tax. Even though my committee received frequent testimony in support of that option, along with newspaper editorials in favor from across the state, seeking a significant gas tax increase this session (beyond indexing) is a bridge too far," wrote Carona.

UDOT to Begin Several Road Projects Soon

KSL News – February 3, 2009

Utah - Work has begun on dozens of road projects reinstated by the Utah governor last month, the Utah Department of Transportation reported this week. UDOT communications director Nile Easton said the agency is working hard to get those stalled projects prepared for the construction phase to begin as early as March or April.

"Some projects are ready to go to bid, others we're moving towards that point," said Easton, adding that the projects are good for the economy by creating jobs as well as easing the transport of goods and services, which also stimulates economic growth. "The most immediate impact is getting contractors working. Each of these projects represents hundreds of contracts and subcontractors that work on these projects, so it's good news for the industry."

In the State of the State address last month, Gov. Jon Huntsman, Jr. announced he was reinstating road projects put on hold because of the state budget gap. Among the projects taken off hold are some segments of the Mountain View Corridor, Utah County's Vineyard Connector, and improvements to I-15 south of Salt Lake City.

GM Paves Way for Plug-In Electric Infrastructure

TheCarConnection.com - February 4, 2009

Washington, D.C. - GM announced an initiative this week aimed at preparing "early-adopter" cities around U.S. for plug-in electric vehicles like the 2011 Chevrolet Volt. The carmaker's announcement at the Washington Auto Show was specifically an effort to increase support from city officials and raise public awareness of the benefits and concessions required for plug-in electric cars.

GM is highly aware that the success of the electric vehicles hinges on the availability of supporting infrastructure by the time the Volt arrives in showrooms next year. The company is working on state, city and local governments, utility companies, universities, clean air coalitions, electric car advocates and others to drum up support to enact pro-infrastructure policies if electric vehicles are going to succeed as a suitable replacement for gas-powered cars.

The first targets in GM's campaign are cities like Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, which are already taking steps to legitimize electric vehicles for personal use.

"Here in San Francisco, we are acting now to make sure the charging infrastructure will be available to support these vehicles as soon as they are ready for sale, and we are working with other cities in the region to make the Bay Area a thriving market for electric transportation," said San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsome. GM is hoping forward-thinking cities like San Francisco will help raise awareness and encourage a critical mass of drivers to purchase plug-in hybrids.

GA Senate OKs Optional Transportation Tax

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution – February 4, 2009

Georgia - Voters could choose to pay a penny sales tax in metro Atlanta to fund new roads, rail and other transportation projects under legislation overwhelmingly approved by the Georgia Senate this week. Under the bill, counties throughout the rest of the state could join together to tax themselves, or fend for themselves. The bill's sponsor, Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) called the approval "the first step out of the gate" in the effort to solve Atlanta and Georgia's transportation crisis.

A separate bill making its way through the House would impose a penny statewide sales tax to fund a list of projects named in the measure; and counties could not opt out. One of the projects listed is a north-south highway tunnel under Atlanta. A similar list of projects was proposed two years ago by Department of Transportation board member David Doss, who believes the tunnel would fill the gap between I-675 and Ga. 400, where neighborhood opposition in the 1970s defeated a surface highway. In contrast, the Senate bill lets regions compose their own list of projects.

Another notable project on the list is a new Northern Arc, which would connect I-75 and I-85 at least 15 miles north of I-285. Construction of both projects would be funded by private companies, and then probably repaid by tolls. With legislative approval, the public would vote on a constitutional amendment in 2010 to allow the tax, but would not vote on the project list.

Indiana State Highway Chief Resigns

Chicago Tribune – February 4, 2009

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana's state transportation Commissioner Karl Browning is resigning and will be replaced by the executive director of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. Gov. Mitch Daniels issued a statement Wednesday saying Browning will enter the private sector at the end of the month, with Michael Reed named as the new commissioner.

The governor said he did everything he could to retain Browning, who he said did an extraordinary job, despite the commissioner's plans for a short stay in state government. Browning began serving for the Daniels administration in early 2005 as the head of the Office of Technology, then moved to INDOT in November 2006.