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Super 70 to Open this Week

WISH, IN - Nov 9, 2007

INDIANAPOLIS – Drivers in the Indianapolis area will soon be enjoying a fully completed 6-mile Super 70, after ten months and \$175 million. Officials at the Indiana Department of Transportation say the ramps from eastbound I-70 to Rural Street and Emerson Avenue will reopen after work is completed this weekend. "This is the most aggressive single season construction project that we've really ever attempted on the part of INDOT," said Will Wingfield.

Even with the accelerated construction schedule, the department kept a strong focus on safety. State police stepped up enforcement in the area by issuing more than 31,000 tickets from the beginning of the project through November 5th. Speeders accounted for 12,000 of those tickets. "Safety has been one of our greatest successes for this project," said Wingfield. "We've had no fatalities and very few major crashes on this stretch of highway."

INDOT officials have not set an exact time next week when the project will open.

I-80 Toll Roadblock is Lifted

Allentown Morning Call, PA - Nov 10, 2007

Pennsylvania - A major roadblock has been cleared for turning I-80 into a toll road after a joint U. S. Senate and House conference committee lifted language from Pennsylvania's massive transportation funding bill that would have prohibited the use of federal funds for the project.

Reps. Phil English, R-3rd, and John Peterson, R-5th inserted the language into the bill earlier this year. The two lawmakers have claimed for several months that turning I-80 into a toll road will be

harmful to local businesses and will drive away truckers and tourists who are the main users of the highway. "Tolling I-80 is akin to a 'Closed for Business' sign in Pennsylvania," Peterson said in a statement.

English said he remains hopeful the FHWA will reject the state's pending application to turn I-80 into a toll road. Pennsylvania officials must receive the Washington's approval before the conversion can take place.

The move by the conference committee eliminates "one of the bumps in the road toward a long-term transportation funding plan," said Gov. Ed Rendell's spokesman Chuck Ardo.

Seattle Mayor Confident for '08 Transit

Seattle Times - Nov 9, 2007

SEATTLE - Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels has not lost hope in voters approving funding for light-rail lines and road lanes, even after the failure of Proposition 1 this week. Mayor Nickels is encouraging Sound Transit to plan to take advantage of a larger and younger group of voters with the 2008 ballot. Voting analysts say off-year elections tend to have a low turnout, and favor older, anti-tax voters.

"In this case, the projects will take five, 10, 15 years to build, and young people understand that having a project in five, 10, 15 years still has a benefit," the mayor explained at a transit board meeting Nov. 8. Sound Transit estimates partial segments to Northgate, downtown Bellevue and Kent-Des Moines Road could open in 11 to 13 years, while other light-rail segments promised in Proposition 1 stretching to Tacoma, north Lynnwood and Overlake near Microsoft would be completed in 2027.

Proposition 1's \$38 billion package would add 50 miles of light rail, 186 miles of road lanes, and other projects in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties through 2027. Sound Transit officials intend to propose another ballot measure in the future, and the agency's chief executive officer, Joni Earl, said the staff has the ridership and cost information needed to prepare a measure for next year. However, Pierce County Executive and agency Chairman John Ladenburg, suspects the state will reject a re-vote until 2009 or later.

Gov. Christine Gregoire and legislative officials also announced this week that they want to focus intensely on funding for a replacement bridge for Highway 520.

From Deadliest Hwy to One of Safest

Nuevo Mundo, CA - Nov 10, 2007

California - Previously one of the deadliest thoroughfares in California, Highway 25 has transformed into one of the safest in the northern half of the state. Seven years ago, 12 people died on the roadway connecting Hollister and Highway 101.

The number of fatalities has dropped to zero since 2002. Since Caltrans performed numerous safety upgrades on the flat 11-mile stretch in 2003, an average of 16 injuries per year have been recorded. From 2003 to 2007, an average of 28 crashes has occurred, compared to 49 from 2000 to 2002.

Among the safety improvements to Highway 25 were the installation of a four-foot median

rumble strip flanked by double yellow stripes; widening shoulders and adding more rumble strips there; lowering the speed limit to 55; and prohibiting passing.

Hollister resident Eric Gammill credits the passing restriction as the key factor in making the road safer. "The rumble strip helps to reinforce the no-passing edict," he said. "since hitting the rumble strip is such an obnoxious experience."



There are many examples of measures that can be taken to improve safety on specific highways or corridors like this one. Congratulations to those who had a hand in making this happen in California. TW

Expert Panel to Solve N.C. Transportation Funding Crisis

Associated Construction Publications, GA - Nov 13, 2007

RALEIGH, N.C. – State leaders in North Carolina have announced the members for a panel of experts to analyze the condition and needs of the state's transportation department and report their recommendations to the legislators. Among the 21st Century Transportation Committee's 24-members is a wide range of transportation and engineering experts, elected officials, business leaders and citizens who will present a preliminary report to the General Assembly by May 1, 2008. Their final report is due before the end of the year.

The committee will concentrate on several points, including:

- Options for funding local transportation
- Urban areas' needs for public transportation
- Methods to encourage fuel and energy conservation in North Carolina
- Ways to use new and innovative technology to enhance the transportation system
- The role of mass transit, rail, airports, ports, and pedestrian and cycling access in providing for the transportation needs of the state
- Appropriately dividing the responsibility for transportation infrastructure between local and state government and any federal role to provide for these needs

Agreement Speeds Up Interchange by 3 Years

Associated Construction Publications, GA - Nov 13, 2007

Manassas, Virginia – A recent agreement between Virginia state officials and the FHWA to purchase needed property will accelerate the Gainesville interchange project at I-66 and Route 29 by three years, according to an announcement by the governor. Governor Timothy M. Kaine also praised the success of efforts to increase state, regional and local transportation funding following a move by the 2007 General Assembly. The increases include financing to extend the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) 11 miles between Gainesville and Haymarket.

The action also will enable the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) to raise about \$330 million in regional funding for transportation and an additional \$70 million will be available

to Northern Virginia localities. The VRE has received \$35 million from the Commonwealth over the last two years to pay for new rail cars, and now it will also reap the benefits of the 41 percent increase in state financing for transit operations. In addition, the agency will see a 66 percent increase in the state share of transit capital funding and another \$25 million for operations and capital improvements from NVTA.

\$750 Million Proposed for Central California Highways

Morgan Hill Times, CA - Nov 13, 2007

California - Central California may soon see the largest South County highway improvement project ever proposed, providing a safer, faster and easier ride for commuters in the area. The \$750 million project proposed by the Santa Clara County Valley Transportation Authority will address long-standing traffic and safety concerns in the region, according to proponents.

"The existing traffic is extremely unsafe," said Kevin Wilson, the authority's Public Communication Specialist, referring to the intersection of U.S. 101 and Highway 25 in southern Gilroy.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Dan Gage said although the project does not yet have funding, officials hope to secure most of the money from federal and state funds, and avoid the use of bonds.

Improvements under the proposal include expanding Highway 25 to four lanes from U.S. 101 to Bloomfield Avenue and add an overpass on the highway at the railroad crossing east of U.S. 101. Gage said officials hope Highway 25 will eventually become the alternative choice for truckers crossing to and from the Central Valley. The proposal also plans to widen U.S. 101 to six lanes from Monterey Road to Highway 129.

Republican Plan at Odds With Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations

Colorado Springs Gazette, CO - Nov 12, 2007

DENVER – GOP leaders in Colorado refused the idea of tax and fee increases to fund highway improvements Monday, saying before new money can go to roads, a "broken system" of funding must be fixed. Legislative Republicans proposed instead that local governments take on maintenance and repair of state highways within their city limits.

Legislators also unveiled a constitutional amendment requiring tax revenue from car sales and auto equipment to be used exclusively for roads, instead of siphoned off for other programs. The Republican leaders believe this proposal could direct an additional \$100 million to roadwork each year.

However, a Blue Ribbon Transportation Panel appointed by the governor is expected to recommend this week that state boost transportation funding by nearly \$1.5 billion a year, through increases in taxes and vehicle registration fees. The GOP proposals have been criticized by panel leaders and municipal leaders, who say they are inadequate, and shifting state roadway maintenance onto the cities would hardly improve the roads.

"Even if we were to accept the funding mechanisms, everyone agrees the needs are much greater than that," said Rep. Mike Merrifield, D-Colorado Springs, a member of the House Transportation and Energy Committee.

House Minority Leader Mike May argues that officials cannot come up with an accurate tally of necessary improvements until they repair the “convoluted” funding system that has the state maintaining urban roads with funding sources subject to being pilfered.

KC Council Repeals Light-Rail Plan

Kansas City Business Journal – November 9, 2007

Kansas - Kansas City's voter-approved 27-mile light rail plan was derailed Thursday by the city council with a 10-3 vote. Council members backing the repeal said the proposal approved by voters in November 2006 had critical flaws including an assertion that it was not legal.

“Everyone who supports light rail has urged us to repeal this,” Mayor Mark Funkhouser. The council also approved a resolution committing to place a new light rail plan before voters by Nov. 4, 2008.

The creator of the voter-approved plan, light-rail activist Clay Chastain, traveled from his Virginia home to attend the meeting. Calling the council's move a “rape of democracy,” he vowed to sue to challenge the constitutionality of the repeal.

Bay Area High-Speed Rail Routes Spark Debate

The Mercury News – November 13, 2007

SACRAMENTO – California board members planning a 700-mile high-speed rail system must make the controversial route decision next month that could determine the future success of the \$40 billion project. California High-Speed Rail Authority's nine-member board must decide how the trains will get through the mountainous area between the Bay Area and the San Joaquin Valley, and the controversy over the choices has become severe.

Five Congressmen over districts from Monterey to the Bay Area are threatening to oppose federal funding for the project if a northern route is chosen that would mainly follow I-580 through the Altamont Pass. Those in favor of the Altamont Pass alternative have said they may sue if the board chooses a southerly route along Highway 152 through Pacheco Pass.

The Metropolitan Planning Commission, representing nine San Francisco-area counties, has suggested a compromise: Build an Altamont line for regional trains with frequent stops, and build a Pacheco Pass route to primarily carry express trains between Northern and Southern California. The rail authority's staff has also recommended a two-line approach with the Pacheco Pass route connecting San Jose and San Francisco, and the Altamont line would split in the East Bay and then head to Oakland and San Jose and could carry both commuter trains and high-speed trains.

“I would say this is the best mobility solution we can offer, given the constraints,” said Mehdi Morshed, the rail board's executive director. The dual line options would add \$5 billion to the cost of the project, but would also improve commuter service, according to Doug Kimsey, the commission's planning director.



More and more we are seeing members of Congress get involved in local issues using the threat of pulling federal funding or using federal agencies to thwart something happening in their home state. This story and the previous one from Pennsylvania are good examples. They generally have no alternative solutions but know

they don't like the options proffered locally. TW

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