



Editor's Note: Last week's editorial entitled: "Climate Change and Transportation: An Inconvenient Truth" stirred many of you to write and offer your thoughts. In fact, we got more comments after that issue of the Tom Warne Report than for any other since we started publishing almost 2½ years ago. For the record, those agreeing with my thesis that the transportation industry take a proactive approach to the subject of climate change out-numbered those incensed by my remarks 10:1. Thanks for the feedback. TW

In This Issue

-  [Houston Light Rail Facing Possible Delays](#)
-  [Purple Line Transit Numbers Competitive for Funding](#)
-  [County Leaders Begin Pushing for Toll Road](#)
-  [Airlines Improving Practices for Delayed Flights](#)
-  [I-80 Toll Opponents Ready for Fight](#)
-  [Transportation Planners Face Funding Shortfall](#)
-  [Highway Technologies Rewarded with Grants](#)
-  [Proposed Rail Line Faces Hurdles](#)
-  [Cities near New Hwy. 212 Want Extension](#)
-  [Global Warming Effect on Roads Stretches Worldwide](#)

Houston Light Rail Facing Possible Delays

KHOU, TX - Dec 4, 2007

HOUSTON – The future light rail in Houston has hit another speed bump. The Federal Transportation Administration told Metro officials that it must reapply for preliminary engineering approval. The news could mean the plans to begin construction on the North and Southeast line in 2008 might be delayed.

Deputy FTA Administrator Sherry Lewis said the letter received Friday by Metro Chairman Frank Wilson informed the agency of the need for reapplication after an October announcement of change from Bus Rapid Transit to light rail. The FTA said Metro needs to submit updated forecasts and capital cost estimates for review. After the FTA's review is complete, Metro must submit a completely new application before construction can begin in order to be approved for federal funding.

According to the ballot measure approving the pursuit of light rail in the region, 50 percent of the project's funding must come from the federal government. Metro spokesperson George Smalley said the agency is still working out the impacts of the letter and how it will affect the construction timeline as well as the possibility of approval for federal funding.

Purple Line Transit Numbers Competitive for Funding

Baltimore Business Journal – December 4, 2007

Maryland - Construction on a light rail line in suburban Maryland with projected ridership of up to 47,000 per day in could begin next year, if the project is awarded federal funding, according to new projections by state transportation officials. The projections for the proposed Purple Line released Monday estimated building costs for the project to be from \$450 million to \$1.8 billion.

"We think the numbers look good in terms of getting funding for the project," said Mike Madden, project manager with the Maryland Transit Administration.

Light rail is one of several transportation options being considered for the area, to relieve traffic congestion between Maryland's growing inner suburbs. Other alternatives include bus rapid transit, which would cost \$1.34 billion to build, or adding more standard bus lines as a less costly choice. The Purple Line has been under consideration since 2001, although community activists have objected to the proposed route which would cut through the Columbia Country Club along the Georgetown bike and hiking trail.

Supporters of the Purple Line say light rail is the most cost-effective way to alleviate the increasing traffic congestion. Light rail would allow people to travel from between Bethesda, Silver Spring and New Carrollton in about 46 minutes during peak travel times, according to transportation officials.

County Leaders Begin Pushing for Toll Road

Houston Chronicle – December 4, 2007

Texas - A new toll road may be built in the future for commuters traveling in north in Montgomery County near Houston as an alternative route to I-45 on the east side of the interstate. The Montgomery County Toll Authority approved the expenditure of \$550,000 on Monday to study the feasibility of the toll road which would begin at Spring Creek and Riley Fuzzell Road and stretch to Texas 242.

The authority will seek a state transportation loan to fund the study which should be complete in under six months. The study's parameters will include possible routes, traffic and revenue projections and design alternatives.

If the study's conclusions are favorable, the toll authority will consider financing options, including the possibility of private funding. "It's becoming the new model with the worsening financial crisis of the Texas Department of Transportation," said Gerry Pate, managing partner of Pate Transportation Partners, which is conducting the study. "You have to have a way to get them off the ground. TxDOT would have built it as a free road, but it has no money. They're looking to counties to pick up the slack."

County officials say the county cannot afford to finance the toll road because of pre-existing debt, and it may have to seek another bond issue for future transportation projects. A \$160 million bond issue was approved by voters two years ago to widen five major roadways under the state's "pass-through" toll program. The unique financing program lets the county pay for roads upfront using bond money and the state pays the county back over a 10- to 17-year period depending on the number of vehicles using the roads.

Airlines Improving Practices for Delayed Flights

U.S. DOT News – December 3, 2007

WASHINGTON - Air travelers should soon be seeing some relief in the number of chronically delayed flights plaguing the industry, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters announced Monday. Following the recent announcement of a federal enforcement effort, airlines have taken action to reduce the delayed flights, including changing flight routes, making additional aircraft available and adding flight crews.

"Tough scrutiny and a willingness to impose serious penalties have caused the airlines to correct these chronically delayed flights," Secretary Peters said. "We will continue to be vigilant, and we will maintain our strong enforcement of these rules to help keep passengers from being treated unfairly."

Secretary Peters said that in May of 2007, the Department began an investigation into 20 U.S. airlines to find out whether airlines were posting unrealistic schedules for flights that rarely operate on time. The investigation focused on chronically delayed flights – those that were over 15 minutes late, more than 70 percent of the time – during the first three quarters of this year. The Department discovered 183 chronically delayed flights operated by 15 airlines during the first quarter, and those airlines were advised that if they failed to address these flights after two consecutive quarters, they would face financial penalties of up to \$25,000 per violation.

Secretary Peters said by the end of September, none of the offending flights from the first two quarters were chronically delayed in the third quarter. Additionally, investigators found that airlines are now more closely monitoring chronically delayed flights, and taking action to correct those issues.

I-80 Toll Opponents Ready for Fight

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – December 1, 2007

CLARION, Pa. – Opponents of adding tolls to Interstate 80 in Pennsylvania are preparing to take their battle to state and federal courts. More business owners, civic groups, economic development agencies and residents are stepping up to fight Act 44, which instructs the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to raise tolls on its own road and turn I-80 into a toll road, according to Brad Ehrhart, executive director of the Clairon County Economic Development Corp.

Ehrhart said the group is willing to file suit against the act and plan to enlist the support of the trucking industry and public watchdog groups such as the Commonwealth Foundation and the Allegheny Institute if necessary. "It's our last option and it could be a long, bloody one," Ehrhart said in an interview following a four-hour "Perspectives on I-80" symposium near the city of Clarion, the center of the growing public fight against the tolls.

For now, opponents plan to attempt to persuade the FHWA that the I-80 revenue-raising proposal approved by lawmakers and Gov. Ed Rendell in July does not meet criteria in a federal transportation bill to qualify as a pilot project to convert an interstate into a tollway, said Ehrhart. The group also plans to increase pressure on legislators to retract Act 44 by publicizing the information that tolls on I-80 will cause devastation across the state, not just in the rural counties the highway passes through.

Pennsylvania Turnpike Chief Executive Officer Joe Brimmeier said that although his agency is

complying with the legislative mandate, the FHWA may still reject the state's application to toll the 311-mile interstate. "We'll continue doing environmental, engineering and traffic and revenue studies and let the Federal Highway Administration make its decision," Brimmeier said. "We're here to listen and learn and hope to come to some reasonable resolution about what Act 44 mandates us to do."



Pennsylvania needs money for both highway and transit systems, in a bad way. It's appropriate for groups to express themselves and their preferences about a funding alternative. However, the position de jour around the country seems to be opposing what is on the table but offer nothing substantive as a solution. The need does not go away just because you don't like the options being proposed. TW

Transportation Planners Face Funding Shortfall

Dayton Daily News – December 2, 2007

Ohio is among many states facing, or soon to be facing, a shortfall in transportation funding. Some anti-sprawl advocates say this is not only a crisis, but also an opportunity. Advocate Gene Krebs, along with his land-use reform group Greater Ohio, is hoping state transportation officials will start looking at ways other than highways to move people and goods around.

"ODOT needs to get away from the highway department mentality and get into a people-moving mentality," he said. "We're going to have to look at streetcars in the city and high-speed rail between major metropolitan areas."

The Ohio Department of Transportation is facing a \$114 million deficit as of 2009, which could reach \$3.5 billion by 2015, causing major construction projects to lose 50 percent of their funding by that year, according to the department's 2008-09 Business Plan, released last week.

In the near future, ODOT plans to organize a task force of government leaders, industry experts and citizen groups from across the state to set priorities for new projects and consider long-term solutions to the deficit, including "new and innovative ways of financing" the state's transportation needs.

Highway Technologies Rewarded with Grants

eTrucker - Dec 4, 2007

Five companies developing innovative technologies to improve highway safety and quality were recently awarded \$1.59 million in grants from the Federal Highway Administration. The Highways for Long-lasting, Innovative, Fast and Efficient (LIFE) grants will help fund the transition from prototype to testing and developing these technologies.

The winners of the Highways for LIFE grant are:

- EZ Asphalt Technology's device that indicates the temperature level at which asphalt can crack.
- Stay Alert Safety Services' device can install pavement markers rapidly into the roadway to reduce the time and risk for workers.
- Pine Instrument's imaging technology can detect before surfacing whether changes are needed in the pavement mix to make it more durable.

- 3M's wet-reflective pavement markings are more clearly seen in the rain.
- Haskell Lemon Construction's sensors determine when asphalt is set, which saves the time spent compacting the material.

More information on Highways for LIFE is available at the program website: www.fhwa.dot.gov/hfl.

Proposed Rail Line Faces Hurdles

Associated Construction Publications, GA - Dec 4, 2007

Duluth, Minn. – Counties and cities along the route of a proposed rail line between Minneapolis and Duluth do not agree with the current plans for the project, possibly threatening the future of the line. Sandstone city officials are vying for a stop in their city and drew up a blue print for an \$8 million station when planners informed the city that they were not invited to the planning session.

Duluth is trying to be released from paying its \$40,000 share of the \$300,000 feasibility study that started last year and will be presented this month. Two Duluth City Council members did not show up at the meeting to vote on the study. The planned rail line would run through five counties including Douglas County, Wisconsin. Officials are hoping to use federal dollars to pay for 80 percent of the project.

Cities near New Hwy. 212 Want Extension

Associated Construction Publications, GA - Dec 4, 2007

MINNEAPOLIS – Drivers in Minneapolis will soon be able to use half of the new Highway 212 in suburban Minneapolis. The Minnesota Department of Transportation is being pressured by cities along the new route to expand the end of the new highway west to Norwood Young America, a town with 3,500 people.

MnDOT says there is no current funding for widening the ten-mile section, but because the interest level, the agency has begun preliminary design work and an environmental review. The department is working with consultants on the preliminary design, which should be complete by December 2008.

Global Warming Effect on Roads Stretches Worldwide

International Herald Tribune, France - Dec 5, 2007

France is taking a stand in the battle against global warming, and last month released a package of bold pledges including one proposition cheered by environmentalists: ending all new highway construction. Environmentalists are keeping a close eye on the government; however, making sure loopholes allowing new roads to promote safety and relieve congestion are not abused. "Every politician in the country wants to keep the power to build small roads," said Michel Dubromel, a transport expert with France Nature Environment, a federation of environmental groups.

The tentative steps taken by France to slow road construction sharply contrast with developments

in other parts of Europe and the rest of the world, such as the Asian Highway, a system of new and improved roads stretching 87,000 miles and crisscrossing 32 countries between Central Asia and Southeast Asia. Many environmental groups acknowledge that sometimes new roads have a positive impact in promoting mass transit and relieving fuel-wasting gridlock. However, some say road projects pull money away from environmentally-friendlier transport, such as rail.

The issue is also occurring in the United States: "Under almost any set of plausible assumptions, widening a highway in a congested urban area will substantially increase long-term greenhouse gas emissions," said Clark Williams-Derry, the research director for the Sightline Institute, a think-tank based in Seattle. Williams-Derry said although there may be short-term benefits to widening roads, they only last about five years until larger numbers of drivers begin using the route. Environmentalists say the increase of global warming was at least part of the reason Seattle voters rejected a package of road and mass transit measures in November.

Roads open up new markets and give access to education and health services, as well as relieve poverty – and roads can accomplish these much more effectively than other forms of transportation alone, said Sybille Rupprecht, the director general of the International Road Federation.

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