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## CA Beach Tollway Hearing Draws Huge Crowd

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*Land Line Magazine* – September 23, 2008

*California* - Nearly 1,000 people gathered in Del Mar, California on Monday to hear arguments concerning a controversial toll road through a popular local beach. The Los Angeles Times reported that opponents and supporters of the tollway tried to outshout each other with chants before the meeting began.

The proposed toll extension of State Route 241 in San Diego and Orange Counties will bisect state parkland at San Onofre State Beach if it is approved. Environmentalists at the hearing repeated warnings about how the toll road will not only cause damage to San Onofre State Park, but also a popular surfing location known as Trestles. Orange county officials and labor representatives argued that the project would reduce traffic and provide jobs.

The \$1.3 billion project will extend 16 miles and take about three years to complete. The California Coastal Commission has already rejected the plans, but the U.S. Commerce Department, which conducted this week's hearing, could override that decision. The agency has authority because part of the highway would be built on federal land.

## NJ GOP Pursues Halt to Toll Hikes as Public Hearings Continue

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*Land Line Magazine* – September 23, 2008

*New Jersey* - State lawmakers are working on a move which would block planned toll increases on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway. The state's 17 Senate Republicans are calling for a veto of the Turnpike Authority's proposal to raise tolls on the roadways from 2009 to 2023.

The GOP senators say the Legislature has the power to call for a veto when lawmakers believe the executive branch is attempting to impose rules or regulations not in sync with the clear intent of the law. The legislators say in this case toll revenues should not be used for a rail tunnel under the Hudson River, which has been proposed by the Turnpike Authority.

Some Democrats are arguing that the state Constitution does not give them the power to veto toll hikes. Citing analysis from the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services, they say the Legislature can only invalidate a "rule or regulation" approved by the Turnpike Authority, not a "resolution," which would be required to implement the toll hikes.

Public hearings on the plan began this week in New Jersey. Under the plan, tolls would double on both the Parkway and the Turnpike by 2012. Turnpike tolls would increase again by 10 percent in 2023. Tolls on the Parkway would be raised by 43 percent in 2009, 50 percent in 2012 and 10 percent in 2023.



*New Jersey is in tough shape financially. Like all states, revenues don't match the amount of funds needed to improve their transportation system. They also have some peculiar problems given how leveraged they are with current money. To the Governor's credit, he has tried to find solutions and been rebuffed every time. It's okay to be against tolls, sales tax increases such as raising the gas tax or any other revenue stream but most opponents don't have a solution to offer or their solution is so minimal in its impact that you can't really call it a solution at all. We need productive discussions and realistic solutions—not what we are seeing today in many states and at the federal level. TW*

## Michigan Lawmaker seeks to Change Road Fund Distribution

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*Land Line Magazine* – September 23, 2008

*Michigan* – The way counties are allocated roadwork dollars may be altered if a Michigan lawmaker's bill succeeds. Sen. John Pappageorge, R-Troy, has proposed a measure that would base the state's road fund distribution for counties on "annual vehicle miles traveled" as reported by the Federal Highway Administration. The change would remove a bias against rural counties, according to the Oakland County lawmaker. Current allocations by the Michigan Department of Transportation are determined by total roadway miles.

"Currently MDOT's fund distribution is based on a formula that doesn't consider how heavily or lightly roads are traveled," Pappageorge said in a statement. "That just doesn't make sense."

Oakland County would see a 26.7 percent boost in transportation funding – or an extra \$17.9 million – by using vehicles miles traveled annually instead of actual miles of road, according to a

report from the Citizens Research Council of Michigan. Other remote areas with lighter populations would see similar increases in funding.

The bill is currently in the Senate Transportation Committee.



*Without a revenue increase there will be winners and losers in this discussion. I suppose if the winners have the votes then something like this will pass. The flip side is the position advanced by MPO's that they pay more into the state highway fund than the rural counties and should get their proportionate share. In most cases that would leave rural countys with very little money for their systems. Reallocation worked about 10 years ago in Utah but only because of a significant increase in the total revenues available. TW*

## Mo. Scraps Private Financing for Bridge Project

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*The Associated Press – September 19, 2008*

*JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.* – Transportation officials in Missouri have been forced to abandon an innovative plan to repair hundreds of the state's worst bridges, blaming credit market troubles for the cancellation of what was hoped to be a model for the nation for rapidly restoring aging infrastructure. The plan was to award one contract to finance, design and build 802 bridges over five years, and maintain them for the following 25 years. The state planned to make annual payments to the contractor for the project which otherwise would have taken 20 years at the state's current pace.

Missouri Department of Transportation Director Pete Rahn said that though good proposals were offered by the private contracting teams, "they simply could not overcome the burden of a financial market that has melted down." The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, which governs the DOT, has decided instead to issue its own bonds to finance the bridge work, and vows that the rebuilding and repairs will still be completed within five years.

Missouri bridges are the fourth worst in the nation, with Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Iowa ranking the lowest. Of Missouri's 24,024 bridges, almost 20 percent, or 4,595, are structurally deficient, according to a 2006 Federal Highway Administration report.



*Our industry is not going to escape the current financial crisis in the United States. This is one example. No matter how much the "bail out" number turns out to be (and many don't believe this will be the last time national leaders go to this well before it's all over) it will be a huge distraction to the ultimate solution to highway funding in the new bill. Add in Iraq, Afghanistan, healthcare, etc. etc. and you see just how much or little flexibility there will be in the monies available for transportation. All this will impact how states are able to use debt to finance their projects as well as many other aspects of the work. TW*

## Plan for Speed Cameras on State Roads Advances

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*The Arizona Republic – September 24, 2008*

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*Arizona* - A high court ruling to let a contract award take effect will allow Arizona to launch its innovative photo speed-enforcement program this week, according to the Arizona Department of Public Safety. Redflex Traffic Systems Inc. will deploy 100 mobile and fixed cameras across the state, making Arizona the first in the nation with the statewide deployment. Similar programs are used in other countries.

Redflex's contract with the DPS had been on hold because competitor American Traffic Solutions Inc. had challenged it, but Department of Administrator Director William Bell vacated the stay. ATS' pending claim states that some of archival Redflex's equipment lacked federal certification, and the company should not have received the contract. Bell said the state law allowing the photo-enforcement program clearly states that the program is in the best interest of the state's public policy.

## **Light Rail Debate for Prop. 1 Continues**

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*Seattle Times* – September 24, 2008

*Washington* – Opponents and proponents of whether an east-west light rail line is necessary to connect Seattle to Bellevue continue to debate whether buses could be used instead. In a campaign debate this week, Bellevue Mayor Grant Degginger said Sound Transit's Proposition 1 will provide a crucial connection to his town.

"The question for this city is, 'Do you want to be on it or not,'" said Degginger, speaking at a debate Tuesday morning for Sound Transit's \$17.9 billion Proposition 1, on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Opponents maintain that cheaper express buses would be sufficient to carry people in the Eastside's I-405 corridor. They say the rail plan ignores the much larger number of residents who commute within the eastside and need north-south service along the I-405 corridor. The Eastside Transportation Association, which supports ride sharing and road projects, says an Eastside bus-rapid-transit system, with stations, could be constructed for \$1 billion and Sound Transit could afford to pay for the system with existing taxes.

Proposition 1 would increase the agency's sales tax by a five cents per \$10 purchase, or approximately \$125 next year for household with an income of \$65,000, for the next 30 years. The revenue would pay for Sound Transit to build light rail to Lynnwood and north Federal Way by 2023, and the east-west line from Seattle to Overlake by 2021. Minimal bus increases would also begin next year, and Sounder commuter trains would almost double their capacity between Seattle and Pierce County by 2015.

## **Fifty-Percent of Approved Budget goes to I-15 Widening**

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*Land Line Magazine* – September 24, 2008

Nevada's Transportation Board has approved nearly a half billion dollars for the state's highways. The seven member board voted unanimously in favor of setting aside \$450 million for the state road budget in the current year. Over half of the money will go to a single widening project in

southern Nevada.

The four-mile I-15 project near Las Vegas will receive an estimated \$240 million from the budget to expand the roadway from Tropicana Avenue to State Route 160. The project, scheduled to begin in summer 2009, will use hotel room tax revenue approved for roadwork in the 2007 legislative session for widening, ramp upgrades and other improvements to the interstate.

The state's 2008-2009 fiscal year road budget also includes \$230 million in federal funding for a new project to resurface 52 miles of I-80 in Pershing County. Northern Nevada roads will receive \$52 million in funding.

## Fate of Honolulu Rail System Placed in Voter's Hands

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*The Honolulu Advertiser* – September 22, 2008

*Hawaii* - Voters in Honolulu finally get to voice their opinion in the long battle over the city's \$3.7 billion elevated commuter rail project this November. The primary election last weekend indicated that it may be a close race on the issue, for which Mayor Mufi Hannemann has been called the number one proponent.

Voters will be asked if they favor "establishment of a steel wheel on a steel rail transit system," which the mayor is hoping receives approval. The mayor's most vocal opponents favor building an elevated highway with high-occupancy toll lanes, which they say will alleviate traffic for a lower cost than building rail. Opponents also say the train will not cause a major adjustment in commuting trends, which significantly favor people driving to work solo.

The city's Alternatives Analysis completed in 2006 showed the majority of residents would support the rail project, and those numbers were expected to increase with the recent spike in gas prices.



*Those following the history of rail projects in Honolulu will recall the project that was scuttled on a 5-4 vote by the city council back in the early 90's. Senator Inouye had gotten them a huge earmark for that project which evaporated after the vote. Certainly, Honolulu needs to do something to fix their traffic problems. Hopefully a solution will emerge and something will be done to preserve mobility in paradise. TW*

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