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Gov. Pushes for Extra \$200M in Bridge Funding

The Tribune-Democrat, PA - Feb 8, 2008

The governor of Pennsylvania is pushing for an increase in bridge funding by \$200 million annually to address the funding shortage facing the 6,000 deficient bridges across the state. Gov. Ed Rendell says that although that will not solve the problem, he hopes it will be a step in the right direction.

Although bridge spending has dramatically jumped since 2003, the number of bridges considered structurally deficient has still grown, Gov. Rendell said. "Every time we repair two (bridges), three more are added to the list," he said. The governor is calling for the state to borrow \$200 million for bridge repairs every year for the next decade, amounting to nearly \$2 billion.

Officials say the additional funding would decrease the number of deficient bridges in the state by 40 percent. "It allows us to get a jump start and tackle more bridges sooner," said PennDOT spokesman Rich Kirkpatrick, noting that the fuel tax would be used to repay bridge debt.

ConnDOT May be Split in Two

Mobilizing the Region, NY - Feb 8, 2008

The Connecticut Department of Transportation could be split into two separate agencies, under a proposal in the governor's State of the State address for the 2009 budget. A proposal for a Department of Highways and a Department of Public Transportation, Aviation and Ports is the most recent attempt to reform the agency which has been under fire for almost two years.

Other interim measures proposed by the governor, which would take effect Jan. 1, 2009, include adding a new chief operating officer to monitor daily operations, adding more than 90 additional inspectors and engineers, installing traffic cameras to catch speed violators and a traffic information hotline.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell said in her address that Connecticut "must not be afraid to rethink the way it delivers transportation services." The pace of transportation reform in Connecticut over the past year has been unprecedented in the state. Governor Rell and some members of the Assembly have proven to be strong transportation reformers and should be lauded for their efforts.



Many models exist across the country for how a state DOT can be organized. In fact, we have done study after study that show the mission is the same but the way the states are set up to deliver on that mission can vary widely. No model is perfect nor considered the "answer key" to the org chart question. They all work; people make them work. TW

Transportation Officials Sign Approval for So. Leg of I-73

Florence Morning News, SC - Feb 9, 2008

Highway officials are ready to begin construction on South Carolina's southern leg of I-73, which was approved at a signing ceremony February 8. The southern stretch of interstate will run from I-95 in Dillon County through Marion County to S.C. 22 (Veterans Highway).

U.S. Department of Transportation Deputy Secretary Thomas Barrett was among the dignitaries in attendance at the ceremony. "Myrtle Beach is going to connect to the rest of the country here," Barrett said. "This road eventually runs all the way up to Canada, and that's a tremendous opportunity. It connects to the highway of the future corridor we're building on (I) 95. It just makes a lot of economic sense. We think it's a smart project."

SCDOT has budgeted more than \$80 million to go toward the \$2 billion needed to build the full I-73 project.

With the recent Federal Highway Administration approval, the state can now take the next step to acquire the necessary rights-of-way for the roadway said State Secretary of Transportation H.B. "Buck" Limehouse, Jr. In the meantime, the FHWA will draft a request for proposal for financing that will allow the state to move forward with construction, which will take about a year.

Meanwhile on the northern leg of I-73, finalization on the Environmental Impact Study for the recommended route from North Carolina to I-95 in Dillon County, is expected this spring.

Truck Crash Statistics Fall to All-Time Low

Business Wire - February 8, 2008

ARLINGTON, Va. – Fatal crash rates involving trucks fell to an all-time low in 2006, according to figures recently released by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Three of the primary measures of large truck safety declined to the lowest rates since the federal government began tracking large truck safety in 1975, including the truck-involvement rate in fatal crashes, the fatality rate and the fatal crash rate for large trucks.

“These figures illustrate the effectiveness of the trucking industry’s continuous efforts to increase safety on the nation’s highways,” said Bill Graves, American Trucking Associations President and CEO. “The motor carrier commitment to safety and industry outreach efforts are playing major roles in improving highway safety for all drivers.”

The 2006 large truck fatal crash rates were reported at 1.93 fatal crashes per 100 million vehicle-miles-traveled, breaking the previous low of 1.97 in 2002. The improved safety figures were set in spite of an increased number of vehicles on the nation’s highways, with an increase of 3 million cars and trucks in 2006 from 2005, according to the FHWA.



Improvements in safety should always be celebrated. There are many reasons for this achievement and credit goes to the motor carrier industry, state regulators and DOTs as well as federal and state officials. TW

Tennessee Has Gas Tax Hike in Future

Daily News Journal, TN - Feb 12, 2008

A tax hike is in the future for Tennessee residents, to help cover the cost of road and bridge construction, although the increase probably won’t be this year, the governor told Murfreesboro Rotary Club members Feb. 12. Governor Phil Bredesen said a bipartisan effort by the Tennessee General Assembly will be required to restructure the state’s department of transportation.

The current gas tax, which was enacted in 1989, is not enough to keep up with TDOT’s needed road projects, Gov. Bredesen said.

Gas Tax Debate Reignited in Minnesota

KARE, MN - Feb 12, 2008

On the opening day of the Minnesota legislature, lawmakers in St. Paul forged ahead with an ambitious transportation bill, reigniting the debate over fuel taxes and other taxes, which may be required to pay for \$8.2 billion in new spending in transportation over the next ten years.

A more ambitious plan than the one vetoed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty last year, it would increase the state gas tax by five cents per gallon, including an immediate two-cent hike, followed by a three-cent bump next fall. Another two and a half cents would be added in 2010, as a surcharge to pay off highway debt. The tax would also be indexed for inflation, to allow for increases without legislature input.

Senator Steve Murphy, a Democrat from Red Wing and head of the Senate Transportation Committee has for years disputed with the Republican minority, and Governor Pawlenty, over the issue of hiking the fuel tax. "We're here because we haven't had an increase in the gas tax in 20 years," Murphy said.

Just after the collapse of the 35W bridge, Gov. Pawlenty said he would support a nickel gas tax hike, and that he'd agree to a higher gas tax only if it was offset by an equal size cut in the income tax. Not only does the newer version of the bill contain that provision, but supporters are hoping they have rounded up enough Republican support to pull off an override if necessary.

Green Transit Corridor Plan Loses Steam

Los Angeles Times, CA - Feb 12, 2008

Atlanta's officials plan to convert an abandoned 22-mile railroad into a transit route and green trail took a major blow this week when a state Supreme Court ruled school property taxes could not be used to pay for the \$2.8-billion green corridor. Mayor Shirley Franklin's administration had planned for \$850 million of the so-called BeltLine's funding to come from future school tax revenue, and had invested \$160 million in the project.

In a unanimous ruling by the Georgia Supreme Court, using school funds for the urban renewal line would violate Educational Purpose Clause of the Georgia Constitution, because it is not an explicit expenditure for educational purposes. Mayor Franklin said although the ruling is "bad news," she does not plan to abandon the project which she has long envisioned as a legacy of her administration. "This is just a bump along the way," she said, adding that the city would look at philanthropic and private sector funding. "All big dreams have challenges, but this is not one we are not prepared to meet."

The project, originally suggested in a Georgia Institute of Technology student in his 1999 master's thesis, was approved for tax allocation by the Atlanta Board of Education and Atlanta City Council in 2005. The following year, local attorney John Woodham sued, claiming the funding source was unconstitutional. There was speculation that with 49 other states using similar tax allocation effectively for economic revitalization, Monday's ruling could hamper not only the Beltline but other urban revitalization projects across the state.

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