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Louisiana Invests in Transportation

KATC – April 14, 2009

BATON ROUGE – The governor of Louisiana announced this week that he plans to work with the state legislature to invest \$245.85 million from the 2007-2008 fiscal year surplus in highway and bridge projects. Gov. Bobby Jindal said the state's past investment in deteriorating roads and bridges has improved the overall quality of the state's infrastructure and proved a worthy investment in improving Louisiana's transportation system.

"We know that the poor condition of our highways contributes to a negative image of Louisiana, increases the cost of doing business here, and makes our highways less safe. We have made many critical investments in our state's transportation system to date, and coupling these surplus funds with those existing investments and those we recently made using federal stimulus dollars, takes us another solid step forward toward improving Louisiana's infrastructure to help our businesses grow and our people succeed," said Gov. Jindal.

With the surplus investment, the state will leverage an additional \$251.9 million in federal funding, according to the governor. Jindal is working with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to determine what projects will receive priority from the funds.

Obama says Stimulus Projects Under Budget

Reuters UK – April 13, 2009

WASHINGTON – Thousands of infrastructure projects underway as part of President Barack Obama’s economic stimulus plan are ahead of schedule and under budget, the President announced on Monday. Under the \$787 billion stimulus plan signed into law in February, 2,000 new projects to improve the nation’s highways and bridges have already been approved.

“By the end of next year our investment in highway projects alone will create or save 150,000 jobs, most of them in the private sector,” Obama said during an appearance at the Transportation Department to push his plan. “What is most remarkable about this effort ... isn’t just the size of our investment or the number of projects we’re investing in. It is how quickly, efficiently and responsibly those investments have been made.”

Obama’s package provided the Transportation Department with \$48 billion for infrastructure improvements, including \$28 billion for road projects.

“The government effort is coming in ahead of schedule and under budget,” Obama said. He added that the 2,000th project will widen a highway and reconstruct an overpass in Michigan. Breaking ground this summer, the project will create 900 immediate jobs and double that number by the time it is finished in 2010.



After about six weeks of contract lettings (and probably one pay cycle for 95% of these contracts) we are already ahead of schedule and under budget. I just couldn’t resist sharing this amazing quote with our readers. On most contracts it is too early to declare victory one month into the process. I suppose that ahead of schedule could mean that the lettings were ahead of the requirements of the ARRA bill. Under budget however...not sure what budget we are under. The way Washington is spending money these days it’s hard to believe anything is “under budget.” TW

Hawaii Lawmakers Move Up Bill to Raise Gas Taxes

KITV.com – April 14, 2009

HONOLULU – Hawaii lawmakers approved a bill this week that would tack an additional 10 cents a gallon to the cost of gas, and boost many fees for drivers. The tax hike proposals were suggested under Gov. Linda Lingle’s 6-year state highway improvement plan in January, but Lingle said she didn’t want them to be implemented so soon.

“In the governor’s proposal the gas tax hike and all the fee increases wouldn’t have kicked in until the economy got better,” explained Rep. Sharon Har. But this week state lawmakers looked at a bill which would have all the taxes and fees begin Oct. 1.

Transportation Director Joe Souki moved the dates up for the fee increases and tax hike because he wants the highway improvements to begin sooner.

“What we are definitely saying is definitely not now. It is really tough to do any kind of tax increases no matter how important it is like highway modernization and saving lives,” said Rep. Lynn Finnegan.

Survey Shows 12% Rely Primarily on Mass Transit

San Diego Union Tribune – April 15, 2009

A recent survey shows 12% of adults in San Diego rely on mass transit as their primary source of transportation, according to the San Diego Association of Governments, which commissioned the telephone survey. Driving alone was the main transportation method for 64 percent of respondents to the survey conducted last summer. True North Research conducted the survey for SANDAG, and released the results Tuesday.

Approximately 48 percent of those surveyed had ridden some form of mass transit, such as a bus, trolley or train, in the region in the 12 months prior to the interview. When asked why they didn't use mass transit more often, 20 percent said the trains, trolleys and buses did not travel to the destinations they needed to go. Other reasons included inconvenient locations for transit stops, public transportation is generally inconvenient and that it is too time-consuming. SANDAG officials plan to use the information for marketing efforts and to improve service.

Architect Pays Mass. To Keep his Bridge Lit

Boston Globe – April 13, 2009

BOSTON – The co-designer of Boston's striking cable-stayed Zakim Bridge has given the state \$15,000 to relight its trademark blue lights after Massachusetts Turnpike Director Alan LeBovidge cut the lights last week to save the \$5,000 monthly lighting bill. Architect Miguel Rosales said shutting off the lights darkens the bridges and its fanned cables, as well as accentuates the harsh orange city lights on the northerly approach.

"I think it creates a bad impression," Rosales said. "The lights on the roadway become dominant and the bridge kind of disappears; I think it should be the other way around. The bridge should be the fixture."

Facing \$2.2 billion in long-term debt and a budget deficit, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority is cutting costs and considering doubling some tolls to fill the gaps. Rosales' donation will cover the cost of lighting the bridge for three months, and he hopes it will inspire other private donations until the turnpike has stabilized its finances.



Every DOT is trying to save money in the current environment. When faced with laying off employees or shutting off the lights, go with shutting off the lights every time, regardless of how aesthetic they are. Still, if private citizens wish to help, their money will always be welcome. TW

\$80M in Fed. Bike Project Funds Unspent in Mass.

Boston Globe – April 13, 2009

WASHINGTON – Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick recently claimed that encouraging bicycle use

is a priority for his administration; however the state ranks last in the nation in applying for federal funds to construct bike lanes, rail-trails, and similar improvements. The state has not used more than \$80 million set aside for this purpose.

Federal statistics show that since 1991, Massachusetts has only spent 37 percent of its share of funding (\$51.1 million out of \$135 million) designated by Congress for bike projects, a much lower rate than any other state. In contrast, Rhode Island and Connecticut have spent 99 percent of their federal dollars.

Many blame the extensive state application process as so slow and intricate that some municipalities do not bother applying. Critics say the cumbersome application process requires cities and towns to pay for engineering and then wait--sometimes for years. A typical rail-trail project in the state takes approximately 10 years to complete.

NY Transportation Commissioner Astrid Glynn Resigns

The Business Review (Albany) – April 13, 2009

ALBANY – The head of New York’s Department of Transportation resigned effective May 8. Gov. David Paterson announced Astrid Glynn’s resignation, thanking her for the role she played in “securing stimulus money for vital transportation projects.”

Appointed by former Gov. Eliot Spitzer in February 2007, Glynn was the first woman to serve as commissioner of the state’s transportation department. She assumed the position after spending much of her career within Massachusetts state government. In a statement, Glynn said she would be returning to her home and family in Massachusetts to pursue other interests.

Glynn’s first deputy, Stanley Gee, a former Federal Highway Administration official, will serve as acting commissioner.

NJ to Sell More Low-Cost but Taxable Debt

Reuters – April 13, 2009

New Jersey – The New Jersey Turnpike Authority is planning to sell up to \$500 million of tax-exempt debt and \$1.25 billion of the new taxable Build America Bonds next week, its financial adviser said Thursday. Originally, the authority planned to sell about \$250 million of the Build America Bonds, but demand was surprisingly strong.

The Build American Bonds are part of Congress’ federal economic stimulus plan for recession-burdened states. Since the federal government is subsidizing 35 percent of the interest rate, the debt should be less expensive than the tax-exempt debt.

New Jersey Turnpike Authority will save up to 90 basis points by issuing the debt instead of conventional municipal bonds, said Jersey-City-based financial adviser Dennis Enright of NW Financial Group.