



In This Issue

- ☐ [Obama, Automakers, Calif. Agree on Emissions Standards](#)
- ☐ [Troubled Contractor is Lowest Bidder](#)
- ☐ [Safety could Suffer if we Boost Mileage by Making Cars Smaller](#)
- ☐ [Md. Road Projects Lose Out to Purple Line as Costs Rise](#)
- ☐ [Traffic Congestion Dips as Economy Plunges](#)
- ☐ [New York Closes Times Square to Traffic](#)
- ☐ [Chicago Transit looks at Riders Using Cell Phones instead of Tickets](#)
- ☐ [NY Transit Feeling Pain from Crippled Advertising Market](#)

Obama, Automakers, Calif. Agree on Emissions Standards

Chicago Tribune – May 18, 2009

WASHINGTON – A recent announcement by the Obama administration will force significant reductions in greenhouse gases emitted by vehicles and gas mileage improvements over the next seven years. It marks a major step in the ongoing global warming battle. Three key players – major U.S. automakers, the federal government and the state of California – have reached a deal which establishes a sole nationwide standard requiring a 30 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in vehicles sold in the U.S. by 2016.

The new regulations are expected to reduce the nation's oil consumption by a total of 1.8 billion barrels between 2011 and 2016, which equates to a 5 percent annual drop in the current U.S. consumption rate of 7.1 billion barrels annually. Under the deal, California will accept the national standard in place of the state's own strict emissions requirements. The Obama standard will achieve the same of emissions reductions as the California regulations, but gives automakers more time to adjust. In the three-way agreement, automakers will agree to drop legal efforts to block California's rules.

"Everybody wins," said David Doniger, policy director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's climate center. "It's going to cut carbon pollution. The drivers of these cars are going to save money at the pump. It's going to cut our national oil dependence ... (and) if you're going to prosper as a car maker, when the economy recovers, you have to be making these clean, high mileage vehicles."

Troubled Contractor is Lowest Bidder

The Hartford Courant, Conn. – May 18, 2009

Connecticut – A contractor with a questionable work history in Massachusetts and still-open inquiries in Connecticut may still be awarded contracts on Connecticut road projects as long as it remains on the state's list of qualified contractors. Despite three failing evaluations for work on libraries in Massachusetts cities, and the risk of losing its certification to work on publicly funded building projects in the state, Putnam Contract Barr, Inc. will not have its standing reviewed by Connecticut's transportation department until its certification comes up for renewal after Jan. 31, 2010.

While Barr has not pursued any state highway or bridge work in Connecticut in 16 years, the contractor came through in February as the lowest bidder for a \$1.9 million bridge job in the Connecticut town of Killingly. Required to select the lowest responsible bid on public projects, the town inquired with the DOT over whether the mired contractor was qualified.

Barr's troubled track record has also sparked probes by the Connecticut department in charge of the list of companies qualified to do work on public buildings, and the agency charged with regulating highway and bridge work in Massachusetts is reviewing the contractor's certification to do transportation work.

Barr was re-certified by the Connecticut DOT on Feb. 9 to the list of pre-qualified contractors for the state. The town of Killingly has not yet awarded the contract to Barr, but the town manager said Barr is currently doing work on another bridge in the town and is doing a good job.



TW

Connecticut isn't the first state to face such a dilemma. Rules should be written to allow the flexibility needed by an agency to deal with this sort of real-time issue.

Safety could Suffer if we Boost Mileage by Making Cars Smaller

USA Today – May 19, 2009

The broad fuel economy and emissions initiative announced recently by the Obama administration has reignited a fiery debate over the priorities between fuel economy and auto safety. Federal officials say there is no tradeoff between the two, because the new rules do not encourage automakers to sell more small cars, which are less safe in crashes than larger vehicles. Some safety experts argue this is not so.

"The deadlines are so tight that downsizing will be a tempting compliance strategy" for automakers, says John Graham, the former rulemaking chief in the Office of Management and Budget. Some safety experts are concerned that the Obama administration's economic focus could undo recent strides made in decreasing highway deaths. Car crash fatalities dropped to the lowest ever in 2007 and is predicted to fall even lower for 2008 – to 1.28 deaths per 100 million miles driven.

The initiative, which requires vehicles to average 35-miles-per-gallon by 2016, has been lauded as a sweeping solution to a variety of problems regarding fuel consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions.

This month Obama withdrew his nominee for head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, longtime safety proponent Charles "Chuck" Hurley, amid environmentalists complaints over Hurley's statements linking highway deaths to fuel economy.

"The bailout monies for GM and Chrysler make the federal government a virtual investor in these companies," says Graham, now dean of Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs. When the government "becomes both a regulator and an investor, it creates a potential conflict of interest. There could be a regulation that improves air quality and improves safety, but maybe the federal government doesn't want to pay for it."



Perhaps most concerning about this story is the last quote from John Graham about the dual role of the federal government being an investor and a regulator of the companies they are heavily invested in. You don't have to be a policy wonk to see the potential issues there. TW

Md. Road Projects Lose Out to Purple Line as Costs Rise

Washington Post – May 20, 2009

Transportation officials in Maryland may be forced to transfer dollars planned for two major road projects in Prince George's and Montgomery counties to a proposed light rail line on which estimated construction costs have risen by \$330 million – to \$1.68 billion. In presenting a 20-year funding plan before a regional planning board, Maryland officials say moving the funding to the Purple Line is required because the project relies on federal money. One of the projects was to widen 10 miles of Routes 28 and 198 and the other would have expanded about three miles of Robert Crain Highway (Route 3), according to documents submitted to the region's Transportation Planning Board.

Transportation officials say cutting the two road projects, both years away from construction, would free up \$536 million for the light rail line. An additional \$500 million for the Purple Line will come from the state transportation trust fund. The regional plans already account for another \$480 million in state and federal funding for a light rail link between Silver Spring and Bethesda, which is included in Purple Line plans. Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) has said he plans to request federal construction dollars for a Purple Line by this fall.

"It shows the higher priority of the Purple Line, but these projects were not likely to be built for a number of years anyway," said David Buck, a spokesman for the Maryland State Highway Administration. The increased cost of the line is a result of federal regulations requiring cost estimates for regional proposals to account for inflation in the years the money would be spent.

Traffic Congestion Dips as Economy Plunges

Traffic congestion on regional highways in the Washington D.C. area has fallen by 3.1 percent since 2005, according to a 2008 survey, resulting in the first decline since the study began 15 years ago. The Metropolitan Council of Governments study found the decline was not the result of better highways and transit systems, but the combination of a the worsening economy and the record-high gas prices last spring.

Using aerial photos taken over three days last spring, the COG did a traffic count that showed a significant reduction in congestion at several choke points in the region. Analyzing 80,000 aerial photos taken during peak travel times, the survey covered the region's 300-mile freeway system, including major interstates such as the Beltway (I-495).

"This is certainly not the way we want to solve the region's traffic problem," said Ron Kirby, transportation planning director for COG, which performed the study. He said traffic congestion may have decreased even more as the economy continued to decline this past winter. "The impacts of the economy are here. "Road travel has declined across the nation, but the drop has been particularly sharp in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

New York Closes Times Square to Traffic

Associated Press – May 26, 2009

NEW YORK – Times Square has gone car-free in an effort by New York City's transportation department to make the city more livable. Officials believe the plan will cut pollution, reduce auto-pedestrian crashes and help traffic flow more smoothly. The agency had barriers fully in place by 8 p.m. on Sunday, May 24, banning cars from stretches of Times Square and Herald Square.

Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan said her department would closely monitor the area during the initial adjustment period, although early traffic reports showed lighter than usual congestion levels near both intersections.

Chicago Transit looks at Riders Using Cell Phones instead of Tickets

WGNTV News – May 27, 2009

CHICAGO – Chicago's Regional Transportation Authority is looking into a revamped fare system that would allow riders to pay using their cell phones. The agency is already working on a plan to let riders charge rides to contactless credit cards, and may add the cell phone technology to the upgraded system.

Similar technology is already utilized in Europe and Asia, and San Francisco is looking to implement the system after trying it on the Bay Area Rapid Transit line. Once the system is implemented, a rider could use their NFC-compliant phone on transit lines across the country to access transportation.

"I think it's one of the most promising technologies out there," said Joseph Moriarty, the RTA's principal analyst. "More people carry a cell phone than carry credit or debit cards."



Regular readers know I am a fan of using technology to advance our transportation initiatives. This is just one more step in making the transactional process of transportation transparent and seamless to the user. Frankly, this is yesterday's technology that is just catching on. What is tomorrow's technology and its application to transportation? Smart people are already thinking about it, working on it and will bring it to market. Soon. Are you one of them? TW

NY Transit Feeling Pain from Crippled Advertising Market

The New York Times – May 24, 2009

New York – The advertising industry is facing the worst market in decades, and the result has been devastating to newspapers, television networks and magazines. But the slump stretches beyond advertising agencies. A company that sells many of the ads on trains, buses and in stations in New York, Boston and Minneapolis is behind on payments due to a sharp drop in sales and rates, which in turn hurts mass transit agencies at a time they can hardly afford it.

Among the hardest hit is New York. Advertising company Titan Worldwide missed mandatory payments to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority totaling \$7.5 million from February to April, citing lower than projected ad sales. That money could have purchased 16 new buses for the agency, which, in the face of multi-billion dollar deficits in the coming years, recently was given a state bailout.

"This is another example of the M.T.A.'s exposure to the global economic recession," said Aaron Donovan, a spokesman for the authority, which is planning a 10 percent toll and fare increase in June.