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## Federal Regulations Put Off Stimulus Projects

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*Lincoln Journal Star – June 24, 2009*

*Nebraska* - Federal stimulus money won't be spent for road projects in many Nebraska localities until 2010 because of federal regulations some officials are calling unnecessary. Nearly \$78 million in stimulus dollars for 18 county and 23 city road projects have been delayed; only one project funded by the stimulus has received approval to enter the bidding process.

Local projects to be put off include the \$9.4 million upgrade of Lincoln city's arterial streets, now scheduled for next year. The state is not losing stimulus funds, and all projects will eventually proceed, but the "greater portion of the money is going to pay out next year," according to Nebraska Department of Roads interim director Monty Fredrickson.

The main issues causing project delays are stricter rules for monitoring local projects and environmental impact documentation. After a 2007 audit by the Federal Highway Administration found weaknesses in local monitoring of federally funded projects, the state DOT rewrote the rules manual, which was approved by federal officials last week.

Every community in the state is required to have at least one employee trained in a new three-week course--difficult for many small towns and counties which only get a federal job every five years or so, and do not have a full-time employee who can be trained. The federal changes will force most communities to redo environmental impact statements for federally funded projects, Fredrickson said.

"We are spending so much time and energy making sure guidelines are in place that we are not

repairing any roads. We are just pushing a pencil," said Larry Dix, executive director of the Nebraska Association of County officials.

## Senators Seek Rail Safety Funding in Aftermath of Metro Crash

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Streetsblog New York – June 23, 2009

*Washington, D.C.* – In the aftermath of this week's fatal Washington, D.C. Metro crash, two senior senators are using it for leverage in their push for increased funding for rail safety. The two chairmen with key roles in transportation policy; commerce committee chief Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) and environment committee chief Barbara Boxer (D-CA), wrote a letter to their colleagues on Tuesday just hours after the crash requesting \$50 million in grants for rail safety technology improvements.

The letter was sent to two senators who oversee the annual transportation budget, Patty Murray (D-WA) and Kit Bond (R-MO), and noted the \$50 million investment in technology improvement grants authorized when Congress approved a new rail safety law. The law supported upgrades to rail safety that utilize a computerized program to prevent crashes, or "positive train control," which safety experts say may have prevented the deadly Metrolink crash in California last year.

According to Rockefeller and Boxer's letter, "More commuters are turning to commuter rail today than ever before. In these tough economic times, with many commuter rail agencies facing budget cuts, funding for the railroad safety technology grants is vital to ensure that important safety measures continue to be implemented."



*Similar to the rush to fund bridge inspections and repairs after the collapse of the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis two years ago this effort is the expected reaction to the tragic Metro accident in DC. As a nation we seem to respond to catastrophic events by creating a patchwork of funding and government programs in lieu of what is really needed—a long-term system that allows agencies to invest year after year in their transportation networks in a sustainable way. TW*

## Idaho Highway Task Force—No Recommendations Until 2010

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Idaho Business Review – June 24, 2009

Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter announced a 15-member task force comprised of legislators and private individuals to decide how best to fund a backlog in transportation projects, although the group will not make recommendations until December 2010. Otter made the announcement at the groundbreaking for the \$33.8 million, Ten Mile Interchange on I-84 in Meridian.

The task force's 18-month window means that no new funding for state roads is probable in 2010, an election year. The task force was part of an agreement reached in this year's legislative session, the second longest ever for the state. Otter disagreed with legislators over his plan to

raise the state's fuel tax and other fees. He settled for an additional \$50 million annually, instead of the \$174 million he had originally sought.

Meanwhile, the Legislature has established its own task force to decide by the 2010 legislative session whether the share of funding from the state's 25-cents-per-gallon fuel tax that now goes to the Idaho State Police and the Department of Parks and Recreation should be replaced with some other form of user fee.

## **Fees May Double on Dulles Toll Road by 2012**

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*Washington Post* – June 24, 2009

Drivers will likely be paying double to drive on the Dulles Toll Road over the next three years to help pay for Northern Virginia's \$5 billion Metrorail expansion, according to an announcement this week by agency officials responsible for the road and the rail project. The proposal by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority begins incremental toll increases in January, and eventually raises the current 75-cent tolls at the main plazas to \$1.50 by 2012, while 50-cent tolls to use one of the on- or off-ramps would rise to 75 cents.

Plans for the 23-mile Silver Line linking Dulles International Airport and Loudon County with the East Falls Church Metro station have long called for toll increases to help fund the project. Construction has already begun on the eastern portion of the project, through Tysons Corner and ending in Reston, which is expected to be in service by 2013.

The project received a \$900 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration, as well as funding from other state, local and federal sources. However, toll revenue is expected to cover more than fifty-percent of the project's cost, which essentially means tolls will continue to increase after 2012. Toll on the eight-lane roadway linking the Capital Beltway and the Dulles Greenway have not risen since 2005.

## **NC Considers Mileage Tax**

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*News14.com* – June 23, 2009

*CHARLOTTE* – A one-cent per mile driven tax in the Charlotte area has been proposed to help fund new road projects in the region by a transportation committee looking for ways to raise the estimated \$12 billion needed to over the next decade to pay for the state's transportation needs. Other recommendations under consideration include a possible \$30 increase to car registration fees, an additional half-cent sales tax or toll roads.

## **Schwarzenegger Announces CalTrans Command Change**

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*Associated Press* – June 22, 2009

California's Department of Transportation will soon have a change in command as Director Will

Kempton leaves the agency at the end of July, according to an announcement this week by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. Kempton, who has served as the CalTrans head since November 2004, will be the new executive director for the Orange County Transportation Authority.

Prior to his position as CalTrans Director, Kempton held other positions within the department. He also served as the executive director of the Santa Clara County Traffic Authority and assistant city manager for the Sacramento suburb, Folsom.

Chief Deputy Director Randell Iwasaki, who has served in several engineering and manager positions with CalTrans over the past 26 years, will replace Kempton. He was named deputy director in 2005.



*Will has done a masterful job of leading Caltrans through some challenging times. Randy's appointment is well deserved. Will and Randy have also done much to reestablish Caltrans' influence and contributions nationally at AASHTO and in other venues. Congratulations to both of these well-respected transportation leaders. TW*

## Airports Scale Back Projects as Passengers Disappear

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*New York Times* – June 22, 2009

New terminals, gates and taxiways have been taken off the drawing board as airport executives halt millions of dollars in improvement projects that now appear unnecessary and too costly. With passenger levels down as much as 20 percent at some airports, expansions to handle crowded terminals and out-of-date parking lots may wait until the economy and air travel recover.

"It's a matter of waiting until passenger levels kick up again," said Sean Broderick, a spokesman for the American Association of Airport Executives. "Airports are really stuck. They are cutting back like any other business. They are in survival mode while still trying to keep an eye on the future."

Airport executives know that delaying modernization projects which seemed feasible as recently as last year will result in future increases to operating costs and inconvenience and delays for passenger.

California's Oakland International Airport put plans for a \$1 billion third terminal on hold after Aloha Airlines went out of business, several airlines cut flights, and food, beverage and car rental revenue dropped by over 20 percent as a result of a 30 percent drop in passengers. In place of building a new terminal, Oakland is doing a \$200 million renovation of an existing terminal. Dulles International Airport near Washington recently shelved a \$2 billion terminal replacement program, along with a \$400 million car rental center.



*As I connected through the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky airport the other day, what I saw validated the trend described in this story. Terminal C is nearly a ghost town--a mere shadow of what was once a bustling operation. Terminal B has mostly regional jets instead of the larger aircraft that once filled its gates. Those of us who travel extensively have seen smaller plane sizes and reduced numbers of flights. TW*

# Washington Ready to Open New 520 Span in 2014

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*Seattle Times* – June 21, 2009

Transportation officials in Washington remain optimistic that a new 520 bridge will be in place in 2014, despite the lack of agreement on what the west end of the replacement will look like, or what financial plan will pay for the \$4.5 billion to \$6.7 billion expected cost. Under new authority approved by the Legislature this spring, Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond said her department is preparing to collect tolls and build pontoons for replacing the aging structure.

Toll amounts have not been determined, but will be collected without toll booths, either by electronic transponders or by billing for each bridge crossing using license plate photos. The toll revenue will pay for the construction of 360-foot-long pontoons for the new bridge.

Hammond said the department is working to hire a contractor. A four-lane bridge just to the north of the existing structure, which was built in 1963, is planned for a 2014 opening. The new bridge will be widened in 2016 to include two bus and carpool lanes, and a trail for pedestrians and bicycles.