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## Metro Explores Ways to Extend Light Rail to Glendale

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*The Arizona Republic* – October 13, 2009

*Arizona* – The light rail authority in Arizona is looking at a significant expansion of the area's transit as the board plans to vote on whether to approve the study of extending the line to Glendale. The study to be voted on by Metro officials was recommended last week by a committee, and would look at five transit options for Glendale. Four of the options under consideration would end up at the sports-and-retail complex at University of Phoenix Stadium at the Westgate City Center.

Three of the potential routes are dependent upon trains going west from downtown Phoenix and continuing along I-10.

Sharp declines in sales tax revenue have forced Metro to re-examine the original 57-mile system approved by voters under Proposition 400 five years ago.

Metro's board of directors will be asked to award an \$878,000 contract to study the five options for extending light rail or rapid buses into Glendale. In about a year, the study will provide Metro with early ridership estimates, the cost of each option and the route that is the most likely candidate to receive federal funding. A final recommendation will likely not be made till around 2012, Metro Planning Director Wulf Grote said.

## Judge Allows Studies and Work for High Speed Rail to

**SACRAMENTO** – Studies and preparation for a high speed rail project connecting Northern and Southern California will be allowed to proceed under a court order from a Sacramento County Superior Court Judge. An attorney for Atherton, Menlo Park and multiple environmental groups failed to convince Judge Michael Kenny that allowing the project-level work by the California High-Speed Rail Authority to continue would unfairly influence the consideration of whether the trains should run through Altamont Pass and the East Bay or Pacheco Pass and the Peninsula.

Attorney Stuart Flashman presented arguments for the Atherton and Menlo Park lawsuit which challenges the rail authority's choice of Pacheco Pass route, under which the trains will run through the Peninsula instead of the East Bay. Flashman argued that if the authority was allowed to spend millions of dollars on studies and engineering work for the current route, they would be unlikely to change course in the future.

Kenny ruled in August that the authority's environmental impact study failed to give a thorough description of the project or provide proper land-use analysis. He also said documents should have been recirculated following the Union Pacific Railroad Co.'s refusal to share its track with bullet trains.

**Chicago Fares could Rise to be among the Nation's Highest**

*The Associated Press – October 12, 2009*

**CHICAGO** – Commuters who rely on the second-largest transit system in the nation could soon be paying more than nearly anywhere in the country under a recommended fare increase by the Chicago Transit Authority to help offset a \$300 million budget shortfall. CTA President Richard Rodriguez presented the 2010 budget which would raise fares for rail service and express bus routes by 33 percent, from \$2.25 to \$3.00.

The budget also includes bus fare increases of 11 percent to \$2.50, while simultaneously cutting subway service by 9 percent and bus service by 18 percent. The service changes will allow the agency to decommission 287 buses that are nearly 15 years old and expensive to maintain.

The authority attributes the budget deficit to the recession and labor contracts, which have resulted in a 30 percent decrease in the agency's funding generated from real estate fees and sales tax revenues. The Chicago Transit Board will approve the budget proposal in November. Fare hikes and service cuts take effect on Feb. 7.

## Report Supports I-80 Tolling

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*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – October 13, 2009*

**GROVE CITY, Pa.** – Opposition to tolling Interstate 80 in Pennsylvania say they will continue fighting the 2-year-old plan which they call a plot to divert money from the state's rural northern regions to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

A recently-released report commissioned by tolling opponents to study the issue, said cars and trucks that use the interstate already generate \$130 million in fuel taxes and fees annually, which is well beyond the \$80 million spent by the Pennsylvania transportation department to maintain the highway.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission is planning to resubmit its application to the Federal Highway Administration to implement tolling on the 311-mile east-west highway. The toll plan is a key part of Act 44, approved by the Legislature in 2007 to help cover highway funding shortages.

Dr. Tracy C. Miller, an associate professor of economics at Grove City College, performed the study and asserted that truck traffic diverted to secondary roads to avoid tolls would increase accident rates, causing two to four additional deaths each year and 100 to 200 more injuries. He added that the billions in borrowing called for in the plan could become a "major long-term burden for Pennsylvania taxpayers and motorists."

## PA Turnpike responds to Anti-Toll Report on I-80

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Land Line Magazine – October 13, 2009

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission says it will take into consideration a study recently published by anti-tolling groups, while continuing to pursue its effort to convert I-80 into a toll road. The "I-80 Tolling Impact Study," published Monday, October 12 by the No Tolls on I-80 Coalition, states that implementing the fees would damage the state's fragile economy and risk safety as trucks and cars switch to alternative toll-free roads.

"In the past two years, we've heard loud and clear that business people and elected officials in the I-80 corridor are concerned about the effects of increased transportation costs, and I reassure them that we share those concerns," Turnpike CEO Joe Brimmeier said in a statement. "Though we've not yet seen the study, our economic team will evaluate the data from the document and consider its conclusions if we receive federal authorization to proceed."

Brimmeier said the turnpike commission is obligated through 2007's Act 44 to seek tolling authority on I-80 and is on the hook to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to the state of Pennsylvania each year. The commission says it will assess how the act's spending will affect economic factors including employment along the I-80 corridor and throughout the state. "Our efforts to help solve the state's transportation-funding crisis under Act 44 cannot and will not come at the expense of Pennsylvania's economy," Brimmeier said.



*We put these two stories here about tolling I-80 to show how an issue can divide groups around a transportation decision. The two sides will never agree. The previous story about routing high speed rail in California also reflects how the sides are pitted against one another there. There will never be unanimity on these decisions. Someone will always be unhappy. Often the agency cannot bring the groups together or run over them in making their decision. If there is an elected official who will lead out then the problems seem to get resolved. Absent that, projects are often delayed or never get built. TW*

# Honolulu Rail Transit Receives Federal Approval

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*KGMB9 News* – October 12, 2009

*Hawaii* – Honolulu's mass transit plan got the green light from the Federal Transportation Administration this week, and it will now move forward into the Preliminary Engineering phase. Monday's approval means the \$5.3 billion project is eligible for federal funding, which could provide up to \$1.5 billion. Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann said the project is still on track for construction to begin at the end of the year.

Planners will now work to complete a final environmental impact statement and obtain state and federal approval on it. The project will immediately start using \$39 million in federal funds, which includes \$4 million in stimulus cash.

"The Hawaii Congressional delegation remains steadfast in its support for a rail transit system in Honolulu," said Senator Daniel Inouye in a statement. "We look forward to continuing our work with Mayor Hannemann to obtain the necessary federal funding. The next big step will come with our push to authorize the federal share of \$1.5 billion."

# City Bypasses Federal Funds to Speed Road Work

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*The Associated Press* – October 14, 2009

*SPARKS, Nevada* – The city council of Sparks, Nevada has decided to bypass federal assistance to help accelerate construction to alleviate congestion at the busy intersection of Pyramid Highway and McCarran Boulevard. Sparks City Council members voted Monday to reject federal funding and oversight for the \$87 million project after receiving Regional Transportation Commission executive Derek Morse's assurance that quality would not be sacrificed.

Without federal assistance, Morse said work could begin in 2012, and be completed by 2014, instead of 2018 with federal funding. The improvements will include a right turn lane from Pyramid Highway onto westbound McCarran Boulevard and additional lanes on Pyramid Highway approaching the intersection.

# Some States Skip Signs on Stimulus Projects

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*New York Times* – October 13, 2009

*ATLANTA* – Georgia has become the latest of over half-a-dozen states to forgo the green highway signs informing drivers that the construction work was funded by the federal stimulus program, saying the signs are a waste of money. The signs, which read "Project Funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act" over the red, white, blue and green stimulus logo cost approximately \$1,200 each in Georgia, according to David Spear, the press secretary for the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Installing two signs per project, and 119 construction contracts awarded by September, the signs

were becoming very costly. "The more we reflected on it, the more we realized [the stimulus critics] were absolutely right: it's not the best use of the money," said Spear, who added that tens of thousands of dollars would be saved by the decision which could be spent on construction work instead.

The Federal Highway Administration strongly encouraged the use of the signs for stimulus projects, but did not require it. "We think the signs promote transparency and accountability – so taxpayers can know where their money is being spent and on what," said Jill Zuckman, the Department of Transportation's director for public affairs. "But the important thing is that the projects be sound, well run and job creating."

Other states opting out of the stimulus signs include Florida, Texas, Virginia and New York, which stopped requiring the signs this summer after reports were published that contractors were charging over \$4,000 for the largest signs.



*I would submit that the public doesn't care about these signs. They just want the money spent and aren't interested that it went to a certain road in their community. If you did a poll and asked the public if they wanted the signs or more money for their roadway system we know what their answer would be. In Georgia they would save enough for several traffic signals by not putting up the signs. At \$4000 per sign in other states it starts to become real money. Signs don't save lives or extend the serviceability of the roadway system. TW*