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Utah DOT Selects Contractor for I-15 CORE

Walt Online – December 9, 2009

This week the Utah Department of Transportation selected a team led by Fluor Corporation for the \$1.1 billion I-15 Corridor Reconstruction (I-15 CORE) project, which will expand a 23-mile stretch of existing interstate in Utah County. The Fluor joint venture, Provo River Constructors, awarded the contract also includes Ames Construction Company, Inc., Ralph L. Wadsworth Construction Company, Inc. and Wadsworth Brothers Construction Company, Inc. I-15 is a major north-south artery between Salt Lake City and the Provo/Orem area in Utah County, which is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation.

The team plans to pursue an aggressive timeline for the project which will add two freeway lanes in each direction between Lehi Main Street and Spanish Fork Main Street, including improvements to 10 interchanges and 55 bridges. The I-15 CORE project will begin construction in spring 2010, with completion scheduled for as early as December 2012. The 2009 Utah State Legislature passed a \$1.725 billion bond to expand and rebuild the I-15 CORE.



For the students of project delivery methods this particular procurement was essentially a fixed price variable scope approach where teams were told the budget and then had to determine how many improvements could be delivered for that price. It is similar to the method used by MoDOT to procure their successful I-64 project that just opened last weekend. TW

Expo Line Plagued With Cost Overruns and Delays

Los Angeles Times – December 8, 2009
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The first rail project connecting to Los Angeles County's traffic-congested Westside has fallen more than a year behind schedule, and ballooned to \$220 million beyond the original budget, according to officials who say additional expenses and delays are possible. The original \$640 million plan was for the line to run from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City and open this summer.

Richard Thorpe, Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority's chief executive, said the project could need tens of millions in additional funding, but he hopes the current \$862.3 million will be the final price tag. The authority, which is constructing the line, receives funding through the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and has contracts with construction firms to do the work. The construction authority and the group of construction companies are involved in a dispute over who is responsible for the delays. The outcome of the dispute could contribute to further project cost increases, officials said.

Among the factors leading to the 8.6-mile line's challenges are decisions to add a station at USC, safety upgrades required near public schools along the route and construction delays where the Expo and Blue lines intersect on Flower Street.

Mass. Legislators seek Fuel Tax Hike

Land Line Magazine – December 7, 2009

A group of Massachusetts legislators gathered December 7 to discuss raising the state's fuel tax and outlawing the use of a tax on vehicle miles-traveled. A 50-cent hike to the 23.5-cent per gallon state fuel tax was among more than a half dozen considerations on the table before the Joint Committee on Transportation; an effort to help cover the Massachusetts Turnpike's debt as a result of the Big Dig

Another bill would send revenue from a ten-cent-per-gallon fuel tax increase to the newly created Transportation Trust Fund, and allow penny increases annually. A separate effort would eliminate certain tolls on the Massachusetts Turnpike and use a 29-cent-per-gallon tax increase to make up for the lost revenue. Tolls would be eradicated between Weston and Boston.

Meanwhile, H3215 is designed to prevent transportation funding from being raised through a tax on vehicle miles traveled, a concept that has been brought up in several states. The bill would halt any pursuit by state, county, city or town officials to collect a tax based on mileage traveled by a privately owned vehicle.



While this was an interesting story the last paragraph is what caught my eye. What if a state prohibits VMT collections and the feds put it in place? You would have a price per gallon system for one level of government and a VMT program for another. We already have trouble comparing fuel tax rates among the states; this would make it nearly impossible. As I travel around the country and speak to citizens in many states I learn that every state has the highest fuel tax in the country. Just an observation. TW

Nebraska looks at Tolls

Omaha World-Herald – December 8, 2009

LINCOLN – Toll roads and other private funding must receive serious consideration if Nebraska plans to continue building highways and bridges in the future, according to a report released this week by an Omaha-based conservative think tank. The Platte Institute for Economic Research said that Nebraska is like many states that will only have enough funding to maintain existing transportation infrastructure.

The report specified the need to particularly consider public-private partnerships in order to finance costly road and bridge projects, like the \$145 million bridge over the Missouri River south of Bellevue, and the \$175 million beltway project around Lincoln. Both projects currently lack funding sources, as traditional sources such as fuel taxes fall flat or decline.

About half of the states in the U.S. permit such partnerships, according to the report's author and former Virginia state transportation director, Shirley Ybarra. "This is a tool in the toolbox," said Ybarra, a Lincoln native. "What we're asking is that perhaps Nebraska should consider this tool." Road funding is expected to be a major topic when lawmakers convene for their 2010 session in less than a month.

Lawmaker Proposes Tolls for Missouri's I-70

Land Line Magazine – December 4, 2009

A lawmaker in Missouri is working to eliminate barriers preventing toll roads and bridges in the state, by filing enabling legislation this week. In his sixth such effort, Sen. Matt Bartle, R-Lee's Summit, has proposed a measure to bring tolls to the state, specifically on I-70 between Kansas City and St. Louis. This will be the last attempt by Bartle, who is term-limited and cannot run for re-election this fall.

The senator's previous efforts to allow the state's Highways and Transportation Commission to fund, build and operate toll roads and bridges have failed to make it out of committee. Bartle's current proposal calls for a \$5 fee for drivers to travel the length of the highway in Missouri. The state's constitution currently prohibits the use of state funds to build toll roads, and would require voter approval if the legislature passed the amendment.

Senate Approves Bill to Hike Diesel Tax

Free Press – December 8, 2009

LANSING, Michigan – Diesel taxes in Michigan would increase by 4 cents per gallon under a bill supported by Republicans that passed a Senate committee this week. The measure would bring diesel taxes to the same level of 19-cents-per-gallon gas tax in the state, and generate an additional \$38 million in transportation revenue.

The bill is opposed by Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, who said the committee vote was surprising, and that alteration to the fuel tax should be part of a broader makeover of state taxes. "I don't like the idea of doing it piecemeal; \$38 million is not going to solve the state's problems," Bishop said. He told reporters before the committee vote that "the timing isn't right" for a fuel tax hike."

Higher Taxes Are Not Worth Better Roads, Survey Reports

Rasmussenreports.com – December 7, 2009

In response to a recent suggestion by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood to increase the federal gasoline tax to cover the growing need for federal transportation funding, Rasmussen Reports conducted a national survey to gauge how the public feels about the idea.

Some of the results revealed by the study include:

- 15% of adults support raising the gas tax to help pay for transportation needs
- 74% oppose a gas tax increase
- 55% said it would be better to cut back on roadwork than raise the 18.4-cent-per-gallon federal gas tax (which was last raised in 1993).
- 22% prefer to raise the gas tax instead of cutting back on transportation projects.
- 23% were unsure
- In early 2009, 10% of adults supported a large hike in the federal gas tax as a way to encourage people to buy more fuel efficient vehicles.
- 81% opposed such a hike.
- Last April 60% agreed with Sen. John McCain's proposal to suspend the federal gas tax for the summer to stimulate the economy, although support for the plan dropped rapidly.
- 62% of voters believe tax cuts are a more effective way to boost the economy and create jobs than increased government spending.