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Missouri Bridge Kicks Off Stimulus Spending

Associated Press – February 17, 2009

Missouri - Minutes after President Barack Obama signed the \$787 billion stimulus package on Tuesday, transportation officials began construction on reportedly the first stimulus-funded project in the nation. Monitoring Obama's signing by video, members of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission voted to approve the 76-year-old bridge's replacement and 3 other projects within one minute of the signing.

Missouri Department of Transportation Director Pete Rahn said the rush to start using the state's \$637 million portion of the stimulus package was intended to demonstrate how quickly the funds could help boost the economy. "This is a great project," Rahn said. "It's something desperately needed, and there is no question it would not be addressed without stimulus money."

The \$8.5 million bridge project to replace the crumbling bridge over the Osage River was not scheduled to begin until 2010. According to a press release from MoDOT, the transportation portion of the bill will result in an estimated 14,000 jobs and a \$2.9 billion boost to the state's economy.



In past issues of The Tom Warne Report I have noted that some states were doing better about preparing than others to spend the stimulus money when it became available. MoDOT clearly was out in front in doing what was intended by the bill--creating jobs. Congratulations to Pete Rahn and his MoDOT team for setting the pace for what will

be a busy spring of contract lettings. TW

Advocates Push Stimulus Spending on Multi-Modal Projects

Mobilizing the Region, NY - February 3, 2009

Conn. - Transportation advocates gathered in Hartford last week to call on Connecticut localities and planning organizations to push for the state's federal stimulus money to be spent on qualifying pedestrian, bike and transit access projects. Currently, less than 1 percent of state transportation dollars in Connecticut are spent on bike and pedestrian projects, despite the fact that 12 percent of all trips taken in the state are by bike or walking. Connecticut Department of Transportation officials agree the state needs to expand its multi-modal approach to transportation, and advocates say the stimulus is the perfect opportunity for the agency to invest in such infrastructure.

At the Hartford press conference, advocates including the chairmen of the Joint Committee on Transportation and several state lawmakers urged municipalities to include crosswalks and bike lanes when paving or restriping roads, which could have helped prevent some of the 35 cyclists and pedestrians who were killed in Connecticut in 2007. The state legislature's Transportation Committee is considering two bills which would require ConnDOT to use a certain percentage of state highway and stimulus funds to improve pedestrian access to transit, and require new and rebuilt roads to accommodate all users, respectively.



The article says that 12 percent of all trips in Connecticut are through walking or bicycling, which is a phenomenal statistic. We don't factcheck the articles we highlight each week but if you have driven some of the roads in Connecticut lately it sure feels like more than 88 percent of the people are using the freeway. I feel that either this number is wrong or the trip counting process is gathering information inconsistent with normal planning practices. TW

Toll Administration Introduces Transponder for Rental Cars

Business Wire (press release), CA - February 17, 2009

GREAT NECK, N.Y. – The pioneering electronic-tolling service provider, Highway Toll Administration (HTA) has introduced the TravelPass mail-order program that provides electronic tolling devices, or tags, to travelers who book car rentals through online travel service provider Travelocity, the first to offer the program.

HTA President and CEO David Centner explained the service works to allow travelers who rent vehicles to zip through toll plazas. "We modeled the TravelPass program on the popular Netflix process, in which DVDs are delivered and returned by mail. If you book a car rental through Travelocity and choose the 'Add a Toll Device' option, a TravelPass electronic toll tag, also called a transponder, can be sent to you by first-class mail – or even faster service, on request."

After your trip, the TravelPass can be mailed back to HTA in the HTA-provided, postage-paid return envelope, and the user's credit or debit card is then charged \$1.99 per day's usage, plus the cost of tolls incurred. The pass is currently accepted in the Northeast and Midwest, where the highest concentration of toll roads exists, and applies to all agencies renting vehicles through Travelocity, according to Centner.

Arkansas Hwy. Projects Undecided for \$357M in Stimulus Funds

The City Wire, AR - February 17, 2009

Arkansas – The state of Arkansas is slated to receive \$357.96 million in transportation funding from President Barack Obama's recently approved economic stimulus package, but where the state will spend those funds is still unknown. Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department spokesman Randy Ort said they are waiting for the Federal Highway Administration to deliver funding and project guidelines to the states in about 3 weeks.

"The two questions everyone wants to know are 'How much?,' and 'Where are you going to spend it?,'" Ort said. "And right now, we really don't have the answers. We'll know more about how this will unfold in the next few weeks. Until then, we don't know" what projects in the state will receive federal stimulus money.

Ort added that the state has approximately \$1.5 billion in projects that are "shovel ready," and once the projects are designated, they are usually contracted right away. Contractors have assured the department that they have the equipment and manpower to handle the construction funded by the stimulus.

The stimulus money will be divided into two categories, with about 50 percent of the state's money placed in a Tier 1 category that are to be obligated to a specific project in under 120 days after receiving details from the FHWA. The remaining funds placed in Tier 2 are to be obligated within a year, Ort said.

Light Rail Ridership Exceeds Expectation

The Arizona Republic - February 19, 2009

Arizona – Light rail officials in Arizona have been pleasantly surprised at the first month's ridership for the region's Metro line, which carried more riders in January than was estimated would ride after a year of service. Saturday ridership was about 10,000 more than predicted, and average weekday ridership was nearly 5,000 above predictions.

Officials hope that if the high numbers continue, it will reinforce the region's requests for federal aid for planned light rail extensions. The increased ridership will also boost revenue, to cut operating subsidies from Phoenix, Mesa and Tempe.

Metro has a few concerns despite the early success of the line, including lower-than-expected park-and-ride lot use, which could indicate that suburban commuters have more convenient ways to travel to work. Trains are also running slower than predicted, and regional transportation officials are contemplating fare hikes, which could lower ridership numbers in the difficult economy.

Gov. Unveils Plans for \$365M in Stimulus Transportation Projects

Baltimore Business Journal – February 18, 2009

Maryland - Within 24 hours of the federal stimulus bill signing, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley released the state's plans for the first phase of transportation projects worth \$365 million and expected to generate 10,000 new jobs. Among the projects on the governor's list are a \$3 million renovation of the BWI Light Rail Station in Hanover, \$65.6 million for 100 new hybrid buses for the Baltimore region and \$5.3 million in light rail improvements in the region.

The state plans to emphasize system preservation rather than new highway projects in its transportation spending, Maryland Department of Transportation spokesman Jack Cahalan said earlier this week. The state is considering a wide variety of "shovel-ready projects" that can begin construction shortly, and more details will be released when the study period is complete, Cahalan said.

"We are acting immediately to get transportation projects out the door so we can preserve jobs, protect families and improve the economy in every region of our state," O'Malley said in a statement. In total, Maryland will be provided with at least \$610 million from President Barack Obama's \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The economic stimulus package contains about \$500 billion in new spending for road, transit and related transportation improvements.

Gov. Calls for Restoration of Local Hwy. Funding in State Budget

All American Patriots (press release) – February 17, 2009

ALBANY – New York's governor announced this week that the infusion of more than \$1.1 billion in transportation funds to New York from the federal economic stimulus package will allow the state to restore local highway funds originally proposed to be cut from the 2009-2010 budget.

Gov. David A. Paterson has directed the state's Budget Director to work with the Legislature to determine how to reallocate the funding in the Highway and Bridge program and restore the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIP) funding to 2008-2009 levels for towns, villages, counties and small cities. Many local highway and bridge projects are not eligible for federal transportation aid.

"The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act gives New York a unique opportunity to promote

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critical infrastructure projects across the state," said Gov. Paterson. "Because the infrastructure funds come with a 'use-it or lose-it' caveat, it is imperative we allocate these funds as quickly and efficiently as possible, to put people to work and create lasting value in our state. My administration is aware of the challenges faced by local governments seeking federal aid, and because many important local projects are not eligible for these funds, I have asked my Budget Director to find a solution in the restoration of CHIP funding."

Republican Governors may Reject Needed Stimulus Funds

WiredPRNews.com – February 19, 2009

Some GOP governors are reportedly considering turning down funds from the stimulus bill in a move critics say puts their political views ahead of constituent needs. A few governors have been accused of allowing political implications to be a motivating factor in choosing not to accept the stimulus money.

Democratic Party chair Carol Fowler is quoted as saying of Republican South Carolina governor Mark Sanford, who is reportedly looking over the bill to see what can remain within his control: "He's so ideological ... He would rather South Carolina do without jobs than take that money, and I think he's looking for a way not to take it."

Texas Republican Gov. Rick Perry, who is reported to have considered rejecting the funds, is quoted by the Associated Press as stating, "My concern is there's going to be commitments attached to it that are a mile long... We need the freedom to pick and choose. And we need the freedom to say 'No thanks.'" Perry has since expressed intentions to accept the money after all.



GOP governors may stand on principle and not take the stimulus money. Many other states are willing to accommodate the redistribution of their funds. Members of Congress who are opposed to earmarks stand on principle while their colleagues stand on new roads and bridges built with someone else's money. For all the opposition to earmarks, Congress has not ceased to go through the process. TW

KC Transit Concept Switches Tracks

Kansas City Star – February 15, 2009

After the seventh voter rejection of Kansas City light rail last November, public officials are working on a regional commuter rail lines on existing tracks, which would be less costly than the electric light rail trains previously proposed. County leaders in Missouri are already exploring ways to use abandoned or existing rail lines to connect their suburban communities to downtown.

"Light rail is dead for now," said Margie Richcreek, chairperson of the Regional Transit Alliance, a Kansas City public transit advocacy group. "But transit is more than light rail." Another option might be to add more express buses, or include a small connector rail system that uses streetcars, which are less expensive than light rail.

The system would still have several hurdles to overcome, since traffic congestion isn't bad enough yet to fuel market demand, combined with the lack of voter support and the difficulty receiving federal aid. 'It's going to be fairly hard to (get funding) if you haven't gone through the environmental reviews, the preliminary design and don't have local approvals,'" said Paul Dean, governmental relations director for the American Public Transportation Association in Washington, D.C.



You just have to look at Salt Lake City and now Phoenix to see that light rail transit can have a positive impact in communities that otherwise appear not to be good candidates for transit service. In both cases, ridership is at record levels and people want more systems. It seems that the early days of any project are hard; but once a city gets over that stage things really take off. Salt Lake City and the Utah Transit Authority are prime examples of how a system can be successful. TW