



## In This Issue

---

- Firm to Pay \$52.4M in 35W Bridge Collapse
- U.S. States Cringe at Costs of High-Speed Rail Projects
- Arlington Expands HOT Lanes Lawsuit, Discrimination Claims
- Columbia River Crossing Design is Questioned
- Finland plans the World's First Green Highway
- Bay Bridge Tolls May Boost Congestion Pricing

## Firm to Pay \$52.4M in 35W Bridge Collapse

---

*Associated Press – August 23, 2010*

**MINNEAPOLIS** – An engineering firm has agreed to pay \$52.4 million to settle the final piece of litigation with victims of the 2007 collapse of the Minneapolis 35W Bridge. URS Corp., which was consulting on the bridge at the time of the collapse, was sued by more than 100 people who accused the firm of ignoring signs of the bridge's condition before the rush-hour collapse into the Mississippi River. Thirteen people were killed and 145 were injured.

URS contended that its engineers were unaware of a design flaw in the bridge that made it vulnerable. The settlement prevents a trial scheduled for next spring that may have resulted in punitive damages against URS. In a statement, the company said the settlement was needed to avoid protracted litigation and admitted no fault.

The terms of the settlement called for \$48.6 million of the settlement to go to victims, and \$1.5 million to be set aside for a memorial for those who died in the collapse.

The last remaining 35W-related litigation now is URS and the state of Minnesota's pending claims against Jacobs Engineering Group Inc., of Pasadena, Calif., which acquired the now-defunct firm that designed the original 35W bridge.

## U.S. States Cringe at Costs of High-Speed Rail Projects

---

*Wall Street Journal - August 20, 2010*

**WASHINGTON** – Several states awarded funding from the Obama administration's plans to build high-speed rail networks are now flinching; scaling back or halting work because the federal government will not pay the entire cost. The most recent round of high-speed rail funding from the federal government requires states to cover 20% of the project's costs. States say this puts them in the difficult position of choosing between more pressing short-term needs and using funds for projects that will take years to finish.

The initial \$8 billion set aside by Congress and the Obama administration to build 13 regional high-speed rail networks attracted a staggering \$102 billion in applications. Applicants for the money added by Congress in this year's budget, which contained the 20% match requirement, dropped sharply, totaling only \$8.5 billion in grant requests.

The cost to complete the high-speed rail links has become a campaign topic in governor's races, with Republican candidates in Ohio, California and Wisconsin calling the projects a spending waste. Wisconsin Republican gubernatorial candidate Scott Walker criticized plans to build a high speed train between Milwaukee and Madison in a campaign advertisement, saying it would cost taxpayers \$810 million to build and \$10 million a year in operating expenses. "I'd rather take that money and fix Wisconsin's crumbling roads and bridges," Walker says in the ad. New Jersey and Virginia have had to put off plans for various rail projects because of massive funding shortfalls.

"We've got some good things that are going, but if the commitment in America is to get to these higher-speed rail programs, then there's going to have to be more help," says Thelma Drake, Virginia's director of rail and public transportation. "We don't have \$375 million to put into our match."



*Add up the numbers and the money committed by the federal government to date is a rounding error in the mathematics of building the high speed rail system being discussed across the nation. The original \$8 billion raised expectations that now must be met with the reality of our transportation funding situation. Truth and reality.*

## **Arlington Expands HOT Lanes Lawsuit, Discrimination Claims**

---

*Washington Examiner – August 22, 2010*

Race discrimination charges are a key part of the Arlington County Board's high-occupancy toll lanes lawsuit filed against Virginia and the federal government, accusing multiple federal and state transportation officials of civil rights violations. In a motion recently filed with the U.S. District Court in D.C., the board requested to expand the lawsuit to include Edward Sundra, a program manager with the Federal Highway Administration. If the board's motion is accepted, Sundra will become the fourth person charged in the lawsuit with "blatant and intentional" neglect of federal and state anti-discrimination laws.

The suit was filed a year ago, when federal and state officials looked at plans to install HOT lanes on I-95 and I-395. The board claims the transportation agencies failed to look at the harmful effects of air pollution on minority populations that live near highways, and also failed to complete proper environmental impact studies before proceeding with the project.

The other individuals listed in the lawsuit – both as government employees and individual citizens – are U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez and former Virginia Secretary of Transportation Pierce Homer. Virginia's current transportation chief, Sean Connaughton, is also named, but only in his official capacity. The board said it decided to include Sundra because they believe it will strengthen their case against the transportation agencies.

"The claims which arise under civil rights provisions of the constitution must be presented as allegations against individuals," according to John Britton, an attorney with the law firm hired by Arlington County to advise on the suit. Arlington Board Chairman Jay Fissette said that despite the new allegations, the board has been in discussions with state and federal transportation officials to resolve the dispute.

## **Columbia River Crossing Design is Questioned**

---

*Daily Journal of Commerce - August 12, 2010*

The overall functional design of the proposed Columbia River Crossing has raised new concerns this week, in spite of other key aspects of the span connecting Portland and Vancouver, Wash. having been agreed upon. The open-web design, which would connect the upper and lower decks of the bridge, has drawn concerns from project stakeholders and engineers. The concerns could delay the project's environmental impact statement process and securing construction funding.

"The open-web design, as presented here, would be unique," said Tom Warne, chairman of the Independent Review Panel, selected by the governors of Oregon and Washington to evaluate the bridge project. "We're not saying it can't be built, and we're not saying it's a bad design; we're just saying it's a unique enough design that it's going to take further testing to move ahead."

Washington state bridge engineer Jugesh Kapur met with government engineers in Japan last year who used the open-web design for two bridges. While the Japan bridges' designs are not exactly the same as the one proposed for Columbia River, many of the same engineering concerns apply.

"They said it was difficult because nothing had been built like that before, so they had to do a lot of testing to get their confidence level up, and learn how everything went together and how to erect it," Kapur said. "They said they would not like to experience going through such a project again."

## **Finland plans the World's First Green Highway**

---

*AP – August 19, 2010*

*HELINSKI, Finland* – Finland is planning the first ever "green highway," with service stations offering charging stations for electric cars and pumps containing local biofuels, the project manager announced this week. The project is planned for the remaining 81-mile stretch awaiting construction on a highway between Turku on Finland's southwestern coast with Vaalimaa near the Russian border.

"The aim is to create the model for an ecological highway that could be used even on an international level," said Aki Marjasvaara, of the Loviisa municipality which is located near the beginning of the stretch of highway and has proposed the project, which involves use of waste and other resources from the region where the road will be built to produce ethanol, electricity and other biofuels for vehicles on the roadway. "No other such project exists. This would set an example to the world."

Fueling stations along the stretch of roadway would also have gasoline pumps. A report outlining various options and costs for the highway will be published in March 2011. Other possibilities proposed for the roadway include lighting systems that switch off at entry points where there are no cars, installation of geothermal heat pumps and providing information to users on their emissions level. The town of Loviisa plans for the project to be complete by 2016 at a cost of about \$900 million.

## Bay Bridge Tolls May Boost Congestion Pricing

---

*San Francisco Bay Guardian* – August 23, 2010

Officials in San Francisco are seeing promising signs that higher tolls on the Bay Bridge may help convince the city that congestion pricing could work for the downtown area during high traffic times. Since the July 1 toll hike, an extra 4,000 commuters have switched to BART, which equals fewer cars on the bridge.

“We have seen 2,000 to 4,000 more people riding BART on an average weekday this month compared with last,” said BART spokesman Jim Allison, regarding the newly higher tolls (\$6) during rush hour on weekdays. Other weekday hours cost commuters \$4, and drivers pay \$5 on Saturdays and Sundays. Carpoolers, previously exempt from tolls, now pay \$2.50.

Executives at the San Francisco County Transportation Authority are encouraged by the trend to switch to transit, and plan to propose a citywide congestion pricing plan to the Board of Supervisors this fall. “We do think that it is too early to draw any conclusions,” SFCTA deputy director for planning Tilly Chang said. “But the general indication is that people are shifting their behavior in some way, which is the goal of congestion pricing.”

---

Copyright © 2004-2010 The Tom Warne Report, LLC. Quotation or distribution for political or commercial use is not permitted. For questions about how this document may be shared or distributed, please visit [TomWarneReport.com](http://TomWarneReport.com) for contact information.