

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2008

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TRANSIT ADVOCATES TELL LEGISLATORS: NO MORE EXCUSES, PASS SB 572 IMMEDIATELY

Chicago-area groups call on Gov. Blagojevich to sign bill once legislature approves it

The following statement reflects the shared sentiments of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, Chicago Metropolis 2020, Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Healthy Streets Campaign, Illinois PIRG, Metropolitan Planning Council, SaveChicagolandTransit.com, and the Transit Riders Alliance.

With only 11 days remaining in the 95th General Assembly, and only 12 days until transit's "doomsday" deadline on Jan. 20, legislators must act Wednesday to provide adequate operating funding and reforms for Metra, Pace, and the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA).

Any elected official who is a friend of mass transit, or who cares about the state's economy and environment must vote for SB 572, the only solution that will provide sufficient operating revenue, induce further management reform, and implement restructured CTA retiree benefits. Other proposals do not represent feasible solutions and, at this point in the debate, are merely roadblocks to getting the job done.

We further urge the governor to sign SB 572 - without making so-called adjustments or improvements - if the majority of legislators select it as the best solution. Should the governor veto or even amend this bill, it will then need a super-majority to pass, creating yet another obstacle in what has now become a race to adequately fund transit.

Finally, we call on legislators to divorce operating funding for transit from the capital funding debate. While legislators also must address state capital funding needs in the coming session, the Jan. 20 doomsday deadline requires that they act immediately to resolve our transit operating crisis. The capital proposal on the table is nowhere near sufficient even to maintain our current transit system; and much more work is needed to craft a sensible and adequate capital plan. The governor and legislators simply cannot hold transit operating funding hostage any longer.

SB 572 is a long-term solution to annual transit funding shortfalls, providing more than \$400 million a year in operating revenue for Pace, Metra, and CTA. SB 572 authorizes an increase in the regional sales tax - the first in more than two decades - by one quarter of one percent in order to raise \$280 million. Further, SB572 is the *only* solution that ensures funding for roads and bridges is not raided, and that the modest tax increase is regionally distributed and does rest solely on transit users.

- more -

No more excuses – add 1

In return for authorizing new transit funding, SB 572 demands more accountability from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and its service boards. The legislation will better integrate the region's mass transit agencies by empowering the RTA with regional planning, fiscal oversight, and fare and service coordination. These provisions will help implement many of the recommendations made in the Auditor General's March 2007 report.

Failure to maintain the region's transit system will cost Illinois businesses and households over \$2 billion a year. The CTA alone will be forced to lay off 2,400 workers and eliminate more than 50 percent of bus routes on Jan. 20. If we allow our transit investment to slip, by 2020, transit ridership would decline by 11 percent, about 187,000 rides a day. Most of those trips would shift to Chicago-area roads, which already weather the nation's second worst "rush hours." That level of gridlock would have an immediate and crushing effect on the region's economy, harm the environment, and tarnish Chicagoland's world-class image for years to come.

All groups are available for comment. Please contact Mandy Burrell for additional contact information: 312-863-6018, or mburrell@metroplanning.org.