



Moving Transportation Forward

Transportation choices matter. Moving people out of cars is better for air quality, our carbon footprint and open space. How Illinois allocates its resources to promote transit and passenger rail can have an enormous impact on the environment.

People will use the transportation infrastructure we build. More roads encourage people to drive while more frequent and reliable transit and passenger rail encourages people to use transit. This is true anywhere in Illinois, from Chicago to Cairo.

In Illinois, 70 transit operators provide services in 32 rural and county operations, 16 major downstate metro areas and the Chicago metro area. When gas prices increased to more than \$4 per gallon, transit ridership exploded in places where it was an option. Where it wasn't, some drivers had to make choices about which household expense to pay as they struggled to absorb increased gas costs.

Illinois must build a balanced transportation network by establishing funding parity between transit and passenger rail and roads. Otherwise, the state risks continuing a downward spiral that has given Northeastern Illinois the distinction of having the nation's third worst traffic congestion.

The last state capital program, 1999's Illinois FIRST, included a funding ratio of 2:1 between road and transit-rail investments. By 2007, that ratio had eroded to 7:1 with a capital budget proposal that allocated \$4.2 billion to roads, \$425 million to transit and \$160 million for passenger rail. The next state capital program and the allocations under the new federal economic recovery package must reaffirm Illinois' commitment to sustainable growth by creating parity between transit and highway investments.

A statewide transit network with intercity rail service as the spine and bus and train routes around Illinois would allow residents to commute to work, run errands and travel within their city without the need of a car. That kind of flexibility would lower auto use, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect open space through transit-oriented "smart" growth. Transit and rail are economic assets that reduce household cost of living and increase disposable income.

Public Transit

The federal economic recovery package and a statewide capital program offer Illinois unprecedented opportunities

to address serious capital funding deficiencies. The state should be ready to take advantage of new funding while reconsidering the role and value of transit in the state's economy.

In 2008, Illinois passed a transit reform and funding bill that produced the first new operating revenue for transit in a quarter century and changed a decades-old formula for distributing funds based on where taxes were collected. The bill also created new powers for the Regional Transportation Authority, requiring it to establish a regional strategic transit plan and strengthening its oversight of CTA, Metra and Pace.

The reform legislation did not address the critical need for capital funding to keep transit infrastructure in good repair by fixing slow zones, performing preventive maintenance, replacing aging vehicles, and improving service. A state match is required to draw down federal capital dollars available through the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts

Program. According to RTA's 2009 budget, more than \$10 billion in capital funding is needed over the next five years to keep facilities in good repair and enhance and expand the system. Unless such funds are made available for transit investments, our transit systems will be unreliable and fail as a viable alternative to the car.

Chicago Metropolis 2020 documented the importance of transit to Northeastern Illinois' economy. The analysis showed that investing \$1.68 billion a year to maintain RTA's current level of equipment and service would produce an economic benefit of \$2 billion, a 21 percent return on investment. Adding new routes and improving equipment raises the return to 34 percent. A capital program requires a new source of funding: the return on investment should be evaluated to determine the level of increased gas taxes to fund new transit infrastructure.

Just as important as the economic health of the region is the economic health of families. Historically, housing affordability has been equated with housing costs. Yet, transportation costs associated with a home's location have been left out of the affordability equation, even though when combined with housing costs they are a more accurate measure of housing affordability.

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Metropolitan research indicates that true affordability is derived from living in compact, mixed-use, transit-rich communities near shopping, schools, and work where residents typically pay more for housing but own fewer cars and pay less for transportation. They dedicate less of their budget to these combined costs. With escalating fuel costs, Americans can no longer afford to ignore transportation costs—the second largest expenditure in household budgets.

Proposed public investments in housing and transportation assets should be evaluated for their impact on the affordability of combined housing and transportation costs and be funded only if they preserve a housing-and-transportation burden that is equal to or less than 48% of area median income.

Car Sharing

I-GO™ Car Sharing serves the Chicago region with an economical and environmentally sound transportation alternative to auto ownership. Car sharing provides members with mobility without the expense of owning a

car. It saves families transportation costs, reduces urban congestion, improves air quality, and cuts greenhouse gas emissions.

The cost of owning a car in the Chicago area averages \$6,700 annually. I-GO members can save as much as \$4,000 a year on transportation costs. Each I-GO car replaces 17 private vehicles. Members increase their walking, bicycling, and transit use while decreasing driving by 5,000 miles/year.

Car sharing can promote community development and improve infrastructure and public systems by:

- saving transportation costs.
- supporting mobility options in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.
- supporting public policy that creates more affordable housing.
- serving as an extension of a public transit system.

Expansion of car sharing opportunities statewide would increase transportation choices and decrease the cost of transportation in communities with transit.

High Speed Rail

High-speed rail is an efficient, low-impact, long-distance transportation alternative. Trains create less air pollution. High-speed trains are three times as energy efficient as autos and six times as energy efficient as planes. High-speed rail focuses on existing urban downtowns with train stations that can pull jobs, people and businesses into central cities. Linking Illinois to high-speed rail lines in neighboring states could revitalize the Midwest region.

The “pure” definition of high-speed rail is a train running on a dedicated track at more than 150 mph. However, many of the benefits of high-speed rail are available with trains reaching 110-125 mph using a combination of dedicated tracks and mixed-use lines. By augmenting Illinois’ extensive rail lines with new tracks, the state could enjoy high-speed runs similar to MARC’s Washington-Baltimore commuter trains and New Jersey Transit commuter trains.

Two years ago, the state doubled its commitment to Amtrak service. Today, five daily round-trip trains serve Chicago, Bloomington-Normal, Springfield and St. Louis; two operate between Chicago and Quincy; three run between Chicago, Champaign-Urbana and Carbondale, and seven daily round-trips are made between Chicago and Milwaukee. These service increases have led to a



substantial growth in ridership. Illinois is a national example of successful passenger rail expansion.

There is demand for intercity rail service in Illinois. The state should purchase new equipment to run on these lines, bring more consistently reliable service to all downstate corridors, establish new service to cities such as Rockford and Peoria, and improve rail line infrastructure to accommodate high-speed travel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fund** transit in the next capital budget at a level on a par with road projects, rather than at a fraction of the investment.
- **Require** businesses that have state contracts in the Chicago area to offer the “transit check” program to their employees.
- **Adopt** a housing-and-transportation affordability standard of 48% of area median income as the definition of affordability.
- **Establish** a housing-and-transportation cost criterion to determine transit and community development investments that should be made.
- **Expand** the definition of transit to include car sharing and find incentives to expand it across the state.
- **Reduce** the state-owned car fleet, particularly in Chicago, in order to save funds and replace it with I-GO Car Sharing.
- **Expand** bio-fuel and electric plug-in infrastructure throughout the state.
- **Add** additional intercity train scheduling on each of the existing lines and add new lines to key Illinois cities.
- **Invest** in capital to reduce travel times and improve reliability.