



For immediate release

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TRANSIT FARE HIKES, LAYOFFS, SERVICE CUTS AND DIVERSION OF CAPITAL "ON THE TABLE" WITHOUT ACTION FROM SPRINGFIELD, RTA SAYS

Chicago – Transit agencies in northeastern Illinois are preparing contingency plans if Springfield lawmakers do not support new transit revenues. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is seeking \$400 million more in annual operating funds and \$10 billion in new capital funds over the next five years.

Last fall, the RTA adopted a budget that included a \$226 million gap in operating funds for the second half of 2007. At today's RTA monthly board meeting, Executive Director Stephen Schlickman said, "The moment of crisis is upon us. Either we do what is right and build a world-class system that allows us to maintain, enhance and expand or we retreat and watch our economy, our air quality, and our quality of life decline."

Schlickman called the consequences of inaction, "Dramatic and severe," adding, "Some combination of service cuts, layoffs, fare hikes and the continuing diversion of capital investments is the only way to meet this crisis without new funding."

Schlickman was joined by the leadership of the three Service Boards: the Chicago Transit Authority, Metra and Pace. Pace has already announced possible service cuts "could disproportionately affect seniors and people with disabilities," said T.J. Ross, Pace Executive Director.

Without new funding, Metra estimates that some \$60 million dollars in capital projects will be redirected to basic maintenance, including \$17 million to replace aging rail cars, \$14 million for track and structure, and \$13 million in signal, electrical and communications.

"We have seen the past and we don't want to repeat it," said Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano. "By deferring maintenance on our system we will be forced into slow zones and disrupted service in the very near future. Funding for both our capital and operating budgets is essential to continue the quality on-time performance record that has made us the premier commuter rail agency in the nation."

--- More ---

BUDGET CONTINGENCY PLANS ANNOUNCED – Page 2

The CTA’s new President, Ron Huberman, said “A \$110 million budget gap represents a significant challenge for the CTA. We are carefully evaluating all our options.”

Schlickman highlighted the findings of a recent report by the State Auditor General that concluded that transit agencies are under funded. He also praised legislators and the Governor’s office for recognizing the crisis and encouraged them to find a solution.

He said that the RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace, along with over 700 partner organizations and 15,000 individual partners, will continue to advocate for funding in the General Assembly.

Schlickman outlined the cost of inaction in terms of lost time and opportunity, lost revenue, and gasoline wasted as more people sit in traffic and air pollution. Long-term consequences, regarding lost opportunities and the decades it takes to recover from neglected investment, were also detailed.

“Given the enormous costs of inaction, I remain hopeful that lawmakers in Springfield – and locally in the transit system’s six counties including Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will -- can forge an agreement on the best way to meet our transit funding needs,” he said.

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Moving Beyond Congestion is a joint strategic plan including the RTA and its Service Boards: the CTA bus and train, Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit service. The goal is to maintain, enhance and expand transit in northeastern Illinois. For more information, visit www.MovingBeyondCongestion.org or call 1-866-771-7781.

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