



For immediate release

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RTA BOARD APPROVES STOPGAP FUNDING *Board calls Governor's plan temporary, says transit needs a long-term plan*

CHICAGO— In an emergency session earlier today, the Regional Transportation Authority's (RTA) Board of Directors voted 10-2 to approve Governor Rod Blagojevich's stopgap plan to fund the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace. The measure will push the transit agencies' doomsday scenarios back to November 4. Originally, CTA and Pace's first round of fare hikes, service cuts and layoffs were slated to begin this Sunday.

"I must emphasize that the Governor's proposal is a temporary fix and without a legislative solution – only delays the inevitable," said Steve Schlickman, RTA's Executive Director.

Today's budget action allows the full \$91 million that the State appropriated for State fiscal year 2008 (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008) for reduced fares for students, the disabled and the elderly and for paratransit services to be allocated to the Service Boards in 2007.

Urging the Board to accept the Governor's proposal, Schlickman reminded the RTA Board members of the agency's responsibility to provide crucial transit services to the nearly eight million residents of northeastern Illinois. If Governor Blagojevich's measure goes forward, "hundreds of thousands of riders will not be forced onto the roads or stranded without transportation alternatives," Schlickman said. "Our economy, our environment and our quality of life will be spared—*temporarily*—from the negative consequences associated with the cuts. If the Legislature and the Governor do not come to an agreement on a long-term financial solution by November 4, the cuts in service and fare increases will happen."

The Board unanimously agreed that while the Governor's plan pushes back immediate funding deadlines, the Illinois General Assembly must act now to save the transit system from sliding into disrepair. RTA Chairman Jim Reilly restated the need for SB 572, as the best and only equitable plan the Legislature has put forth. The bill, which has bipartisan support throughout the RTA's service region, addresses long-term operating budget needs, reforms to the CTA pension and health care system and reforms recommended in the report issued earlier this year by independent Auditor General William Holland.

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“We remain hopeful that the State Legislature will approve a comprehensive solution to the transit funding crisis confronting CTA, Metra and Pace,” said Reilly.

Barring additional state funds, he cautioned, the consequences for the 2008 budget would be bleak. “Deeper service cuts, additional fare increases, more capital deferrals and more layoffs will be required to close the projected gap in the operating budget.”

The RTA Board of Directors did approve the 2008 Budget Marks for the Service Boards which, due to the lack of action in Springfield, do not include any new funding for mainline service operations or ADA paratransit – a federal mandate. A bleak capital program was also put forth but is uncertain given the lack of a statewide capital program.

Next week, the state Senate is expected to reconvene and take up the issue of mass transit. The transit agencies agree that the stopgap funding will provide additional time for the Legislature and the Governor to adopt a comprehensive plan to fill capital and operating shortfalls.

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About the RTA: The RTA provides financial oversight, funding and regional planning for the three public transit operations in northeastern Illinois: The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus and train, Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit. For more information, visit www.rtachicago.com and www.MovingBeyondCongestion.org.