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ELECTED OFFICIALS FROM ACROSS METRO CHICAGO CALL ON LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR TO INCREASE TRANSPORTATION SPENDING

*Business and labor leaders join county chairs and mayors in calling for new
transportation funding package this spring*

CHICAGO – DuPage County Board Chair Bob Schillerstrom, Lake County Board Chair Suzi Schmidt, Palos Hills Mayor Gerald Bennett, chair of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Batavia Mayor Jeff Schielke, chair of the CMAP Transportation Committee, joined Chicagoland labor and business leaders today to warn of the dire consequences of continuing to defer needed investments in our state’s transportation infrastructure. They called on legislators and the Governor to make comprehensive funding for Illinois transportation a priority this year.

At a Thompson Center press conference, the officials said Chicagoland commuters, businesses, and the region’s economy cannot afford to wait another year as our transportation systems continue to deteriorate. They described bottlenecked freight lines in northeastern Illinois, underfunded and aging transit systems, and badly congested urban and suburban roads, all suffering from declining investment in recent years.

“We are the crossroads of North America, but if do not increase our infrastructure investments, we will not be able to maintain our transportation preeminence, nor our economic viability. If we cannot move workers to the workplace and goods to the marketplace, our ability to compete and to attract and retain jobs, faces serious jeopardy. Future economic growth will by-pass our region and our state. We need a comprehensive transportation and transit funding plan and we need it now,” DuPage County Chairman Robert Schillerstrom said.

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The officials came together in support of the Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC), a diverse group of statewide and regional business, labor, and governmental and planning organizations that have joined together to support a strong transportation alliance for Illinois.

“The transportation system in our region is in a state of crisis – both for highways and mass transit. We continue to lose businesses and jobs to other parts of the country because of the state of our transportation infrastructure. The General Assembly and the Governor must find a way to address the transportation needs of the region right now or the economic future of northeastern Illinois will be in jeopardy,” said Lake County Chairman Suzi Schmidt.

In February, TFIC issued a report calculating Illinois’ underinvestment in transportation at \$25 billion based on studies commissioned and needs identified by government and industry groups. Based on this assessment, TFIC is recommending that the General Assembly increase annual program investments by \$5 billion a year for the next five years.

In contrast, except for a modest \$200 million increase for mass transit, the Governor's proposed FY2008 capital budget released this month continues the status quo for transportation, with no increased funding for infrastructure improvements. The Governor's proposed budget has no new capital funding for airports, rail passenger improvements or the CREATE rail freight congestion program. And his proposed capital program calls for \$1,875 million for highways, a cut of \$100 million from this year's level.

"Capital funds are desperately needed to protect people's mobility and the movement of goods that are essential to the region's prosperity," said Gerald Bennett, chairman of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). "Without these new investments, northeastern Illinois risks losing its competitive advantage in the global economy. CMAP will work with our partners to ensure the fiscal responsibility of strategic investments that meet broad priorities of the region as whole."

For transit, the Governor's budget proposes a \$425 million bond authorization to be appropriated over three years, with the first \$200 million of that amount in FY2008. While this will enable RTA and downstate transit systems to match federal funds, it falls far short of the \$2 billion a year in increased funding RTA needs.

“Transportation is one of the engines that drives our economy and we would be foolish to continue to ignore the needs and underfund this vital asset,” said Mike Skarr, President and CEO of the Naperville Chamber of Commerce and Treasurer of TFIC. “We must continue to engage in long term planning and investment for the future.”

Since 2003, state capital spending for highways and transit has been cut by more than 60 percent (\$1.2 billion a year), and the number of miles of state highways repaired and improved each year has dropped from about 1,200 in 2003 to a proposed 360 for 2007.

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“Investing in transportation will create jobs for working families in Chicago and help continue to grow our economy,” said Dennis Gannon, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor. “Illinois will lose thousands of jobs if the legislature fails to reinvest. This is one important issue in which labor and business are in complete agreement.”

TFIC has pledged to work with the General Assembly to come up with a plan to fund its comprehensive economic growth package, which would supplement federal dollars allocated for many of these programs. Among options on the table, it said, are reducing diversions of dollars from the Road Fund into other areas of spending, state and local bond issues and as-yet unspecified increased state or local revenue sources that will be determined during the legislative process.

TFIC is a diverse group of statewide and regional business, labor, industry, not-for-profit and governmental organizations that have joined together in a united and focused effort to support a strong transportation alliance for Illinois. The Coalition takes a comprehensive approach and seeks to speak with one voice for all of Illinois when it comes to transportation funding needs at the federal and state level. This comprehensive approach involves all modes of transportation, including rail, air, water, highways and mass transit. For more information about TFIC, visit www.TFICIllinois.org.

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