



**Regional
Transportation
Authority**

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RTA REACTS TO STATE LEGISLATURE PASSING HB 656

Springfield – A key funding and reform proposal was approved by the Illinois General Assembly today, and Governor Rod Blagojevich announced his intention to sign the measure into law after adding a provision that will provide senior citizens throughout the state with free rides on fixed route public transit. Following the General Assembly's approval of this last change, the measure will provide the operating funds needed to avert significant service cuts, fare increases and layoffs that are scheduled for January 20th.

“A broad regional, bipartisan group of lawmakers made a strong statement today. They have voted to provide stability to our transit system and ensure millions of transit riders will have access to critical services without interruption,” said RTA Board Chairman Jim Reilly. We thank the Governor and legislative leaders for their hard work. We are eager to move forward.” In response to the Governor adding the free rides for seniors, he added, “We agree it is a valuable benefit for a population that has a significant number of low income people.”

House Bill 656 includes an operating funding plan, institutes important management and fiscal reforms at the RTA along with the CTA, Metra and Pace and contains an historic plan to reform and improve the CTA pension and retiree health care system.

House Bill 656 is a long-term, comprehensive proposal that includes a ¼ of 1% increase in the sales tax across the RTA region and authorizes the City of Chicago to increase the real estate transfer tax to help support the CTA. In addition, the proposal contains an additional sales tax increase of ¼ of 1% in each of the collar counties, which would be controlled by the individual county boards and could be used for transportation and public safety projects that are approved by each board.

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“Senate Bill 656 is a sound plan that addresses the long-term needs of the system,” said Steve Schlickman, Executive Director of the RTA. “It is a regional solution to a regional problem. Only the residents who benefit from the system – those in the six-county RTA region – would be asked to support the system. We think it is the most equitable way to fund regional transit operations.”

“The regional transit network is critical to our economy, our environment and our quality of life,” noted Reilly. “We all know how important it is, and today the legislature acted to address the crisis. Representatives Julie Hamos, Sid Mathias and Senators John Cullerton and Rickey Hendon deserve a lot of credit for their work over the last three years on this legislation. They worked with their colleagues in both the House and Senate to produce a very sound piece of legislation.”

While House Bill 656 addresses the operating needs of the CTA, Metra and Pace, the General Assembly is still considering a state capital funding plan that would address the infrastructure needs of the system. New trains, busses, stations, track and upgrades are urgently needed across the system.

“The most pressing need was to keep the system running while avoiding higher fares, reduced service and layoffs,” said Schlickman. “Now that we have addressed operating funding, the next challenge is to address the growing demand for services in the region. We need to expand the system and update our infrastructure, and we look forward to working with the Governor and legislature this year on a state capital plan.”

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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.