



Contact: Anne-Marie St. Germaine 312-953-7155
Rob Nash (Springfield) 312-909-1314

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Strong Bipartisan Support for RTA Reforms, Transit Funding

\$452-million proposal approved for transit operations, General Assembly to consider pension reforms, capital investment in overtime session

Springfield, IL – An overwhelming majority of the Illinois House Mass Transit Committee approved a \$452-million transit operation funding proposal and a package of reforms to improve coordination and efficiency in the transit system.

“Today’s strong, bi-partisan vote reflects the shared belief in the importance of our transit system and the need to invest in it,” noted Jim Reilly, Chairman of the Regional Transportation Authority. “We are very encouraged that the General Assembly recognizes the vital role transit plays in our region and that funding for the system must be addressed this session.”

The Illinois Mass Transit Committee approved two amendments to Senate Bill 572 that would provide funding for transit operations and reform the roles of the RTA and the Service Boards – CTA, Metra and Pace. The funding proposal would:

- Increase the RTA sales tax in the six counties of northeastern Illinois by 0.25%, yielding approximately \$280 million;
- Impose a new RTA real estate transfer tax in the City of Chicago to raise \$42 million;
- Extend the standard state 25% match to the proposed sales and transfer tax to provide \$80.5 million;
- Continue the support of transit service for the disabled and elderly by instituting an additional state match of 5%, raising \$50 million

The committee approved the measure 13-4 with strong bipartisan support from both City of Chicago and suburban members.

“Without funding, the millions of people who rely on transit every day will face drastic service cuts and higher fares,” noted RTA Executive Director Steve Schlickman.

“Today members of the Mass Transit Committee have loudly voiced their support for additional funding for the system.”

The committee also approved a reform measure by a vote of 20-0, which would implement the recommendations found in the recent report on the transit agencies issues by the Illinois Auditor General, improve coordination and increase accountability in the system. The proposal would require the RTA to adopt a long-term strategic plan, measure the performance of the Service Boards, review capital investment projects and reform budgeting measures.

“We have long-believed that some reform could improve the coordination among the RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace,” said Reilly. “Together we have worked over the last year to improve efficiency and effectiveness and we think the reforms adopted today will help us continue that work.”

The committee acknowledged the need to continue work on mass transit funding and pension reform issues before the General Assembly adjourns for the summer. Several members of the committee called the vote a means to continue discussion on the funding issue, identify funding for needed capital investments and complete work on CTA pension reforms.

“Committee members have worked diligently to ensure that reforms and funding go hand-in-hand,” said Rep. Julie Hamos (D-18, Evanston), chair of the House Mass Transit committee. “We simply cannot put off what business leaders and transit riders and the public understand to be a critical need to ensure the future of mass transit in northeastern Illinois.”

“The amendments passed today reflect a regional solution to a regional problem. The bipartisan support shows how strongly we believe that now is the time to act on mass transit for Illinois,” said Rep. Sid Mathias (R-53, Buffalo Grove), Republican Spokesperson on the committee.

“We know that the funding and reform proposals must be accompanied by CTA pension reform,” said Reilly. “Without addressing the challenges with the pension, it would not be responsible to provide more funding to the CTA.”

The significant capital needs of the transit system remain unfulfilled pending the approval of a state capital investment plan.

“Identifying funding for operations is important to the millions of people who use our transit services, but without capital funding, we will be unable to repair tracks, replace buses or trains or expand the system with new services. It is critical that the General Assembly approve a capital plan to meet these needs,” said Schlickman.

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