

THE

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WEEKLY TRANSPORTATION REPORT
SUNNY MAYS SCHUST, EDITOR

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EXECUTIVE DIGEST

Highway Trust Fund

The Highway Trust Fund will run out of money as soon as next week and the Federal Highway Administration will cease twice-daily reimbursements to state transportation departments effective Monday, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said today. *Page 1*

Congress

In addition to immediately solving the Highway Trust Fund crisis, extending taxes that support federal aviation programs, authorizing additional funds for Amtrak, and passing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2009 are among the critical transportation issues Congress confronts when it returns to session next week. *Page 3*

Presidential Campaign

Republican governors, mayors, and members of Congress pushed their party's presidential nominee to commit to improving the nation's infrastructure during this week's Republican National Convention in St. Paul, MN. *Page 4*

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, tapped last Friday by Sen. John McCain of Arizona to be his running mate, has used the state's infamous "Bridge to Nowhere" in her speeches to demonstrate her commitment to curtail wasteful government spending. But, according to media reports, Palin was for the bridge before she was against it. *Page 7*

Awards

The Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia transportation departments are one of 10 national finalists in the America's Transportation Award competition for their \$2.47 billion rebuilding of a key bridge on one the most heavily traveled stretches of the East Coast's main artery, Interstate 95. This project won a regional award in the innovative-management/large-project category. *Page 7*

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Higher fuel costs are causing a growing number of Illinois truckers to illegally fill their rigs' tanks with untaxed diesel fuel intended strictly for off-highway vehicles, the Illinois Department of Revenue said last week in announcing stepped-up enforcement efforts. *Page 14*

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More than 140 participants from across a diverse group of rail transportation professionals attended last month's 2008 national meeting of the AASHTO Standing Committee on Rail Transportation, hosted in Milwaukee by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. *Page 11*

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Drinking Age

The acting chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board expressed his opposition last week to recent efforts by some college administrators to lower the nation's drinking age from 21, which Congress in 1984 mandated states adopt or lose 10 percent of their federal highway funds. *Page 12*

Tolling

Seeking to cut down on wait times at the U.S./Mexican border, governors are exploring the concept of public/private partnerships to construct vehicle toll lanes at entry points. *Page 13*

A toll road in Colorado will be among the first in the nation to completely eliminate tollbooths and use open-roll tolling. *Page 14*

Librarians

The next presentation of the Transportation Librarians Roundtable, a monthly webconference series, will take place at 2 p.m. EDT Thursday, Sept. 11. *Page 13*

Climate Change

The Kansas Energy Council is considering a proposal to reduce the speed limit on some Kansas highways to reduce the state's emissions of gases linked by many scientists to global warming.

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Internet Access

The Washington State Department of Transportation discontinued wireless Internet access at 28 rest areas Monday because of poor subscription numbers. *Page 15*

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AASHTO President Pete Rahn has appointed Sandra Larson as chair of the Research Advisory Committee and Kevin Chesnik as chair of the Technology Implementation Group. *Page 16*

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FHWA seeks to fill three senior executive positions. *Page 16*

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States Face Delayed Federal Reimbursements as Peters Calls for Senate to Pass Trust Fund Bill

The Highway Trust Fund will run out of money as soon as next week and the Federal Highway Administration will cease twice-daily reimbursements to state transportation departments effective Monday, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said today.

In a swift change of administration policy, Peters urged Congress to pass a bill next week that the president can sign to promptly transfer more than \$8 billion of general revenue into the Highway Trust Fund to prevent delays in state payments.

“The cash-flow problem we face is serious,” Peters told reporters on a conference call this afternoon. “Our state partners who are working so hard to keep our bridges and roads in good repair deserve better than IOUs from Congress.”

While the Highway Trust Fund began this fiscal year with a balance of \$8.1 billion, a combination of reduced travel and motor-fuel tax revenue plus high contract reimbursements in the busy summer construction season has reduced the current balance to less than \$1.4 billion, according to FHWA. As a result, the highway fund will now be living paycheck to paycheck from the U.S. Treasury, U.S. DOT officials said.

Beginning next week, FHWA will reimburse states on a weekly basis every Thursday for projects the federal government has obligated to fund. Rather than paying all bills submitted in full twice a day as has been the practice, the weekly payouts will be pro-rated based on the money available. For example, if the Highway Trust Fund’s Highway Account only receives enough tax revenue to cover 70 percent of bills submitted in a week, all reimbursement requests received will be paid out at 70 percent. The following week, according to FHWA, it will pay the balance of money owed on prior weeks’ bills and then begin pro-rating new reimbursement requests received that week.

“As a former state DOT administrator, I understand that the measures I have outlined will be tough on state programs and state budgets,” Peters said. “That is why it is absolutely imperative that Congress not waste time. We have got to get states out of the box they have been put in by Washington’s addiction to wasteful special-interest spending and pork-barrel projects.”

Tom Madison, the new federal highway administrator, briefed state transportation executives regarding the crisis by teleconference this afternoon. The American Association of State Highway &

Transportation Officials convened another call with its state DOT members this afternoon to discuss the problem, which the organization and numerous others in the transportation field have been warning about for months.

“This unprecedented action by FHWA is going to have grave repercussions for the states, for hundreds of thousands of workers in the construction industry, and the driving public,” said AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley. “It will worsen the financial crises many states are already facing, and it will delay or halt needed transportation projects and leave contractors and suppliers with IOUs instead of cash to pay their workers.”

Horsley applauded the Bush administration’s reversal of its position on HR 6532, a House bill sponsored by Ways & Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel, D-NY, that would infuse the Highway Trust Fund with \$8.017 billion in cash this month – restoring from the government’s General Fund money that was transferred out of the trust fund as part of a 1998 budget deal.

The White House in July issued a veto threat for the Rangel bill, stating it is “both a gimmick and a dangerous precedent that shifts costs from users to taxpayers at large” and would increase the federal budget deficit. The administration has previously proposed covering the projected Highway Trust Fund deficit through a combination of slower payments and borrowing from the fund’s Transit Account balance.

The House of Representatives ignored the administration and voted 387-37 to approve the Rangel bill July 23. The bill has not come up in the Senate, though that chamber’s Appropriations Committee has voted to approve a similar transfer as part of the FY 2009 transportation spending bill, which is unlikely to be passed this month due to other budget disputes with President Bush.

Peters said today that while it is “far from an ideal solution,” the administration reversed course on the bill and is now urging the Senate to pass it when Congress returns to Washington next week.

“Senators have spent the past five weeks at home, where we hope they have heard the message loud and clear from the states: We must get an infusion of cash into the Highway Trust Fund this month or billions of dollars in transportation projects and hundreds of thousands of jobs will be slashed,” Horsley said. “Congress has many priorities to address as it reconvenes next week, but ensuring a sound financial future for transportation has to be high on the list.”

The Highway Trust Fund is nearing a zero balance earlier than previously projected because gas-tax receipts are down dramatically over the past eight months as Americans have responded to record-high prices at the pump by driving less – which means buying fewer gallons of fuel and thus paying less in gas taxes.

“The urgency of the situation was heightened earlier this summer when we began to see significant and sustained declines in vehicle miles traveled,” Peters said.

Highway Account outlays for this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, are now expected to exceed receipts by more than \$8 billion – wiping out the balance the account had when the fiscal year began last October. For this month, the Highway Account is forecast to collect \$2.7 billion in tax revenue but receive requests from states for \$4.4 billion in project reimbursements, according to FHWA.

House transportation leaders issued statements today urging their Senate colleagues to quickly pass HR 6532.

“I fear that states will begin to slow their investments in highway construction because of the cash-flow problems of the U.S. Department of Transportation,” said Rep. James Oberstar, D-MN and chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. “I urge Senate Republicans to release their hold on the bill. We must enact this critical legislation early next week to avoid slowdowns or reduction in infrastructure investment.”

Rep. John Mica, R-FL and ranking minority member of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, had similar sentiments.

“This is a crisis for the nation,” Mica said. “We are in an economic slowdown, and we can’t afford to start shutting down critical infrastructure projects. These projects are vital to transportation safety and the economy, and provide thousands of well-paying jobs.

“Unless we act now, each state’s highway programs will experience severe disruptions and thousands of highway projects may be delayed or canceled,” he warned.

The American Road & Transportation Builders Association, which represents contractors who rely on federal transportation funds to get paid for many of the projects they do for state DOTs, issued a statement today echoing the call for immediate action.

“We are encouraged the Bush administration put politics aside today to address a very serious problem,” said ARTBA President Pete Ruane. “We urge the Senate to act as quickly as possible to approve similar legislation so that important transportation improvement, safety, and traffic-congestion-reduction projects can continue to move forward.”

Returning Congress Faces Several Unresolved Transportation Matters

In addition to immediately solving the Highway Trust Fund crisis, extending taxes that support federal aviation programs, authorizing additional funds for Amtrak, and passing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2009 are among the critical transportation issues Congress confronts when it returns to session next week.

Congress plans to adjourn for the year by late September, meaning there are only 10 legislative days remaining to move bills through the House and Senate.

Transportation supporters are watching to see what becomes of the Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act, different versions of which passed the Senate and House by veto-proof margins. The House has named conferees but the Senate has not yet named them. Once the Senate names its conferees, it’s expected there will be a quick conference committee and final passage before adjournment.

The legislation would authorize nearly \$16 billion for the development of intercity passenger rail for Fiscal Years 2009 to 2013. Amtrak would get \$9.9 billion in base funding, while an additional \$1.75 billion would be available to states and/or Amtrak to finance the construction of and equipment for high-speed rail. Another \$2.5 billion would be set aside to be given directly to states for new

passenger rail projects. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority would get \$1.5 billion over 10 years to modernize its heavy-rail and bus system.

Amtrak ridership has surged this year as travelers seek alternatives to high gas prices. Ridership systemwide went up 13.95 percent in July 2008 compared to July 2007 while ridership on state-supported and other short-distance corridors surged 19.2 percent.

Congress must act this month to extend the revenue authority of the Federal Aviation Administration, which expires Sept. 30, or aviation taxes will not be collected starting Oct. 1. The FAA's taxing ability got a temporary three-month extension in June.

Finally, transportation appropriations for FY 2009 must be enacted. Because of the budget disputes with President Bush, it is widely expected that Congress will pass a continuing resolution extending FY 2008 funding levels into the next fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. The new Congress and president would then revisit appropriation levels after taking office in January.

GOP Leaders Call on McCain to Support More Funding for Transportation Infrastructure

Editor's Note: The Democratic National Convention took place last week in Denver. Last week's AASHTO Journal examined transportation policy proposals of the Democratic Party and its presidential nominee, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. Today we examine proposals from the Republican Party and its nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona.

Republican governors, mayors, and members of Congress pushed their party's presidential nominee to commit to improving the nation's infrastructure during this week's Republican National Convention in St. Paul, MN.

With last year's collapse of the nearby Interstate 35W bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis still a fresh memory and as reconstruction of that span nears completion, several Republican officials used the convention to press their case for greater transportation investment.

A victory by Sen. John McCain of Arizona would help increase private-sector investment in building roads, bridges, tunnels, and other types of transportation infrastructure, said George Pataki, former governor of New York. Many Republicans are calling for a more free-market approach, *National Journal* reported.

"I know that Sen. McCain has been very supportive of innovative ways of building infrastructure, including empowering the private sector," Pataki said. "When you simply have government doing everything, it doesn't have the resources. What we have to do is form public/private partnerships. I know Sen. McCain has been supportive of that."

Rep. John Mica of Florida, ranking minority member of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, led a group of Republicans on a tour Wednesday of the new I-35W bridge. Mica said the speed in completing the \$233 million replacement bridge should serve as a national model.

"It normally takes at least seven to eight years to undertake an infrastructure project of this magnitude, but the new I-35W bridge was contracted to be designed and completed in 437 days," Mica said in a news release. "If Congress used this 437-day plan and cut the red tape for other

infrastructure projects around the nation, we could lower infrastructure costs dramatically and bring critical projects to completion with much greater efficiency. This will be our goal in the next highway bill.”

Mica commended the Minnesota Department of Transportation for nearing completion of the massive project in record time. The bridge is expected to open to traffic by next month.

The ranking member used this week’s convention to sell his \$1.5 trillion infrastructure plan to fellow Republicans. Mica wants to raise a third of the money in federal revenue, another third through public/private partnerships, and the rest by selling bonds, *Congressional Quarterly* reported.

Mica said he is optimistic that he can sway McCain into supporting a much greater investment package next year.

“We may not get to the \$1.5 trillion, but that’s the goal,” Mica said. “Hopefully McCain and his advisers would be receptive to some of those proposals and I have no reason to believe he would not. When he sees a well-thought-out plan, he’s the first to bite.”

McCain’s Record Demonstrates a Long-Held Opposition to Transportation Funding

McCain has been a frequent critic of transportation spending for “pork projects” and earmarks.

“I truly believe the integrity of the nation’s transportation system is compromised by the disgraceful amounts of pork-barrel spending that have saturated our highway authorization bills,” McCain said in a recent interview with AAA on transportation topics. “It’s disgraceful, and it breeds corruption.”

McCain’s most prominent campaign proposal during the primary season earlier this year was to suspend the federal motor-fuel tax for the summer to help drivers cope with skyrocketing prices at the pump. The “gas tax holiday” proposal went nowhere in Congress.

Asked by AAA if he would support an increase in the fuel tax – which hasn’t been raised or adjusted for inflation since 1993 – McCain responded, “Of course not. How can you ask Americans for more money, the form of taxes, if you’re spending \$223 million for a bridge in Alaska to an island of 50 people on it? Pork-barrel spending is rampant, and Congress refuses to set any kind of cost-benefit [thresholds] or prioritization of these projects. The funding is not related to need or requirement, it’s only related to the power and influence of an individual member of Congress. And that’s disgraceful.” (*For more on the Alaska bridge, see related story on Page 6*)

McCain has called gas taxes regressive.

“If someone thinks we ought to increase taxes on gas, they are laying a heavier burden on the lowest-income Americans and I don’t think that is fair,” he told CNBC in an April interview.

McCain was one of only 18 senators in 1998 to vote “yes” on cutting the federal gas tax by 4.3 cents. In 2000, he voted against a nonbinding Senate resolution supporting the continued use of federal fuel taxes for the construction and rehabilitation of highways, bridges, and transit lines. Also that year, he voted “yes” to institute a federal fuels-tax holiday. The resolution passed and the tax-holiday bill failed.

In his fight against earmarked projects, McCain has said he wants transportation decisions made at home, not by politicians in Washington.

“I believe strongly that transportation funding decisions must be based on input from state and local officials that understand their unique transportation needs and priorities,” he told AAA. “I would like to be in a situation where state and local governments have much stronger input.”

McCain’s campaign website does not include a policy paper on transportation matters among the 18 topics presented in its “issues” section.

Republican Platform Calls for Restoring Highway Trust Fund’s Purchasing Power, Lacks Details

The Republican Party adopted its 2008 platform during the first day of its national convention Monday in St. Paul. The 60-page document contains three paragraphs regarding transportation under a headline “Restoring Our Infrastructure.”

“We call for more prudent stewardship of the nation’s Highway Trust Fund to restore the program’s purchasing power and ensure that it will meet the changing needs of a mobile nation,” the document states. However, the platform contains no specific details about how the country should raise more revenue to offset 15 years of inflation that have eaten away at the trust fund’s buying power.

The platform notes, “The politics of pork distorts the allocation of resources for modernizing the nation’s infrastructure. That can leave entire communities vulnerable to natural disasters and deprive others of the improvements necessary for economic growth and job creation. We pledge a business-like, cost-effective approach for infrastructure spending, always mindful of the special needs of both rural and urban communities.”

Also noted in the transportation paragraphs are the Republican Party’s commitment to support a level of investment in the nation’s transportation system that “will promote a healthy economy, sustain jobs, and keep America globally competitive. We need to improve the system’s performance and capacity to deal with congestion, move a massive amount of freight, reduce traffic fatalities, and ensure mobility across both rural and urban areas.”

The platform supports “careful reforms” of environmental reviews and the permitting process to speed projects to completion while expressing a commitment “to minimizing transportation’s impact on climate change, our local environments, and the nation’s energy use.”

Finally, the platform calls for an end to mandatory targets for use of renewable fuels in the U.S. motor-vehicle fuel supply. Congress first enacted a renewable fuels mandate in 2005 and expanded it in the 2007 energy law, which President Bush supported. But Republicans expressed opposition to those policies to use ethanol and other renewable and alternative fuels, favoring market solutions over government requirements.

Palin Speaks Out on the Alaskan “Bridge to Nowhere”

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, tapped last Friday by Sen. John McCain of Arizona to be his running mate, has used the state’s infamous “Bridge to Nowhere” in her speeches to demonstrate her commitment to curtail wasteful government spending. But, according to media reports, Palin was for the bridge before she was against it.

“We suspended the state fuel tax and championed reform to end the abuses of earmark spending by Congress,” Palin told the convention in her acceptance speech Wednesday night. “I told the Congress, ‘Thanks, but no thanks’ on that Bridge to Nowhere. If our state wanted to build a bridge, we were going to build it ourselves.”

The Gravina Island Bridge was proposed to replace the ferry that currently connects Ketchikan, Alaska, to the Ketchikan International Airport on Gravina Island, which has 50 residents in addition to the airport. The bridge was projected to cost \$398 million. Members of the Alaskan congressional delegation, particularly Rep. Don Young and Sen. Ted Stevens, both Republicans, were the bridge’s biggest advocates in Congress and helped push for federal funding. But the project encountered fierce opposition outside of Alaska and was cited as a symbol of pork-barrel spending.

Palin campaigned for governor in 2006 on a build-the-bridge platform, telling Ketchikan residents she felt their pain when politicians called them “nowhere,” the *Anchorage Daily News* reported. In September 2006, Palin campaigned in Ketchikan, saying the bridge was essential for the town’s prosperity. A year later, Ketchikan’s Republican leaders said they were blindsided by Palin’s decision to use the \$223 million in federally earmarked bridge funds for other projects.

Sharon Leighow, Palin’s gubernatorial spokeswoman, said as cost projections increased to nearly \$400 million, the governor began to favor less-expensive alternatives for improving access to the Ketchikan airport.

Work is underway on a three-mile road on Gravina Island meant to connect the airport and the new bridge. State officials said last year they were going ahead with the \$25 million road because the money would otherwise have to be returned to the federal government.

Leighow said the road was already under construction when Palin stopped the bridge from moving forward and even without a bridge, it will open up new territory on the island for development.

Woodrow Wilson Bridge Over Potomac River Is a Finalist for America’s Transportation Award

The Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia transportation departments are one of 10 national finalists in the America’s Transportation Award competition for their \$2.47 billion rebuilding of a key bridge on one the most heavily traveled stretches of the East Coast’s main artery, Interstate 95. This project won a regional award in the innovative-management/large-project category.

Jurisdictions participating in this multistate project – the Woodrow Wilson Bridge connects Maryland and Virginia over the Potomac River through a tiny water section of the District of Columbia – hired a general engineering consultant in 1998 to help all sponsoring agencies navigate community consensus, finalize the environmental permit, integrate the work of five section designers,

and perform full construction management of the 15-year project. The joint endeavor has pioneered new policies and procedures for a mega-project that includes replacement of the drawbridge formerly owned by the federal government and upgrading of four nearby interchanges along 7.5 miles of the Capital Beltway (Interstate 95/495).



WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE PROJECT

The Woodrow Wilson Bridge connects Virginia (left) with Maryland (right) over the Potomac River through a tiny water section of the District of Columbia. Once completed, its 12 lanes will relieve a major Capital Beltway bottleneck.

The project is replacing the old six-lane bridge – a notorious bottleneck on the eight-lane Beltway – with a new 12-lane bridge, separating local from express lanes, and providing future space for mass transit. Management achievements include a detailed financial plan that has kept cost escalation to 1.3% since 2001 – a small number for such an expensive, multiyear project – and an integrated construction management plan that has helped keep the project on schedule.

“Achieving success with this \$2.47 billion program demanded finding new and better ways of delivering transportation infrastructure to America,” said Maryland Transportation Secretary John Porcari. “This former ‘magnet for controversy’ has become a source of pride for everyone concerned.”

Editor’s Note: This is the fourth in a series of 10 profiles of finalists for the America’s Transportation Award Grand Prize and People’s Choice Award. The AASHTO Journal is featuring finalists alphabetically by state until the awards presentation Oct. 19 at the AASHTO Annual Meeting in Hartford, CT. You can watch a video summarizing all 10 projects and cast your vote for the winner at tinyurl.com/ATAvoting. More than 33,000 votes have been cast so far for the People’s Choice Award.

Oregon to Light Interchange Using Solar Power

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski announced this month that his state is installing the nation’s first solar demonstration project in a highway right of way, moving Oregon a step further in its role as a leader in renewable power development.

The project is the result of collaboration with Portland General Electric, US Bank, and the Oregon Department of Transportation. Materials and installation will be provided by Oregon companies.

“This project will represent a new era for energy in Oregon,” Kulongoski said. “It will represent a step forward toward our vision of an energy independent Oregon – and it will represent the endless opportunities before us to chart this course of clean, reliable and renewable energy for our state.”

The project will help light the way for drivers at the Interstate 5/Interstate 205 interchange in Tualatin. Kulongoski, PGE President and CEO Peggy Fowler, and Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Gail Achterman broke ground on the project, placing the first of 594 solar panels.

“PGE is committed to developing and promoting more solar power in Oregon,” Fowler said. “We appreciate the innovative approach the governor and ODOT are taking to support our solar industry and make Oregon first in solar highways.”

The 104-kilowatt solar photovoltaic system — covering about 8,000 square feet and roughly the length of two football fields — will produce about 112,000 kilowatt hours a year, or 28 percent of the 400,000 kilowatt hours used to light the interchange. The \$1.3 million project is expected to be completed by December.

Electricity for the highway interchange is provided by PGE and the added solar power will be handled through a net metering arrangement. The solar panels will produce electricity during the day, supplying power onto the PGE grid, and PGE will return an equivalent amount of power at night to light the interchange.

To learn more about the project, visit www.oregonsolarhighway.com.

Kansas Task Force Begins Developing Recommendations for a New Transportation Strategy

With an eye toward new strategic approaches to transportation, the newly formed Transportation – Leveraging Investments in Kansas task force held its first meeting last week.

Serving on the task force are more than 35 leaders from the fields of business, labor, and government. They are charged with developing a set of recommendations for a new strategic transportation approach as the state’s 10-year transportation program comes to an end. Toward that goal, the task force will hold a series of local consultation meetings around the state this month.

“We’re trying to bring people together in an interactive process where they work together to think about local priorities and regional priorities, and how that ought to come together for state priorities,” said Transportation Secretary Deb Miller.

As directed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, the focus is three-fold for the task force:

1. **A commitment to keeping roads and bridges safe and in good repair.** That commitment resonated with T-LINK task force member Pat Hageman, a Rooks County commissioner, who said western Kansans want to see existing roads maintained properly. “A lot of industry and a lot of commerce move up and down those roads,” he said.

2. **Forward thinking without relying on old business models.** “Transportation should also be about economic development,” said Julie Lorenz, KDOT public affairs director. “We need to be making the best investments we can on behalf of the state.”
3. **A new approach that reflects today’s fiscal realities and creates a framework to prepare Kansas for its transportation future.** Miller noted that fiscal and economic conditions are much more challenging today than they were in 1999, when the state government passed its soon-to-expire 10-year transportation funding bill. Construction costs and the price of gasoline have all shot up, and certain construction materials are in short supply.

Transportation needs don’t stop even as prices rise and the economy changes, Miller said.

“We all know that these are huge investments and, without question, I believe they are important to our economy,” she said. “But we need to be sure when we are making these investments that they are exactly that.”

Tim Rogers, T-LINK co-chair and executive director of the Salina Airport Authority, said “many times people take for granted that they can drive to the store so easily or get to another city in the state or have freight come in.”

Rogers said he was pleased to be part of a diverse group of individuals who will “really work hard to develop a program that meets the needs of Kansas today and 10 years from now.”

Plan Provides Information on Funding Gap and New Business Models

The launching of the task force follows the June release of Kansas’ Long Range Transportation Plan, which analyzed all modes of transportation including highways, railroads, buses, aviation, and bicycle/pedestrian.

Projected revenues are going to fall short of future transportation needs, the plan warned. The state will need \$2.9 billion a year for the next 20 years (in 2006 dollars) to meet those needs. But it has been calculated that Kansas will take in only about \$1.4 billion a year in state, federal, and local revenues to fund transportation, leaving a gap of \$1.5 billion a year.

Rogers said transportation funding should resemble a stool with three balanced funding legs: local (including private), state, and federal.

Whatever the funding challenges, Lorenz said flexibility and accountability are crucial for the state to move forward on transportation planning.

“We need to choose projects more quickly,” she said. “We need to be more responsive. We need to be able to help the state take advantage of opportunities when we have the chance.”

Funding Options to be Examined

The common denominator for all the transportation needs and wants is they all require money. With a gas-tax increase off the table as far as the governor is concerned, where will the money come from? Sebelius has asked task force members to examine federal, Kansas, and local funding sources and determine if creative financing tools make sense for the Sunflower State. More revenue could be

raised by putting tolls on more Kansas roads, but state officials are only broaching that as a possibility at this point.

Transportation officials want Kansas stakeholders themselves to think about the complexities of funding priorities. To that end, the T-LINK calculator, an interactive tool that will allow users to create and fund their own theoretical Kansas transportation program, was developed. Calculator users can develop their budget by making assumptions about current funding sources and choosing from a variety of potential new funding options. Calculator users then will allocate their budget on a variety of transportation modes. The purpose is to help Kansans understand the possibilities and trade-offs associated with various transportation and funding scenarios.

“We’re hoping that it can be a tool to help educate and illustrate some of the complexities and some of the issues we face as a state when it comes to transportation,” said Kyle Schneeweis, a KDOT project manager who designed the calculator tool. “There’s kind of a give and take: every time you want to increase spending in one area it’s got to come from somewhere else.”

The calculator is expected to be available for widespread use by mid-September, and will be accessible online. Those who attended the Aug. 27 meeting received a tutorial on laptop computers.

“It is an extremely useful tool,” said Olathe Councilwoman Marge Vogt. “I encourage every taxpayer to get online and see what it takes to keep our transportation system viable.”

More information about the task force is available at www.kansasTLINK.com.

Rail Transportation Conference Drew Record Number of Participants to Milwaukee

More than 140 participants from across a diverse group of rail transportation professionals attended last month’s 2008 national meeting of the AASHTO Standing Committee on Rail Transportation, hosted in Milwaukee by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

Committee Chair Astrid Glynn, New York State Department of Transportation commissioner, presided over a meeting that witnessed a record attendance level. Wisconsin Transportation Secretary Frank Busalacchi kicked off the committee’s meeting, which also featured Rep. Tom Petri, R-WI and member of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee.

The hot topic this year was the status of upcoming federal reauthorization of transportation programs, about which AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley led a discussion. Participants also focused on a variety of issues impacting the passenger and freight rail sector, including innovative research in railroad safety and development, shared-use corridors, and environmental stewardship.

Thirty state transportation departments were joined by professionals from across the rail transportation industry, including Amtrak personnel, not-for-profit rail and public transit advocacy groups, consultants, federal government officials including Surface Transportation Board Chairman Chip Nottingham, and representatives from several short-line and Class I railroad companies.

Class I railroads “do have a gap of about \$39 billion through 2035” in needed funding to increase rail capacity to support freight movement, said Matt Rose, president and CEO of Burlington Northern Santa Fe.

Citing the proposed Railroad Investment Tax Credit for expanded capacity, Rose stated it “would provide public benefits in terms of getting more tons off the highways, reduction in dependence on foreign oil, and reduction of greenhouse gases.”

The committee continues to work toward addressing the major issues facing state rail professionals, especially as the federal government increasingly addresses passenger and freight capacity expansion, planning, and funding.

NATION IN BRIEF

FHWA Rule Will Increase State Flexibility for Advance Construction Procedures

The Federal Highway Administration issued a final rule last week that aims to increase state flexibility in spending federal-aid highway funds.

The rule eliminates the requirement that states reserve federal funds for advance construction projects, some of which might not end up using federal money, the Bureau of National Affairs reported. That flexibility frees states to use the federal money for other projects. The advance construction procedures have been modified to comply with the 2005 transportation authorization law known as SAFETEA-LU.

Under advance construction procedures, a state may begin projects without a guarantee of federal funds but with federal approval of the project. The state may then later apply to have the project converted to federal aid funding.

Pennsylvania and West Virginia’s transportation departments submitted favorable comments after the draft rule was published in March. No comments were submitted in opposition to the proposal. The final rule, which takes effect Sept. 25, is available at tinyurl.com/FHWA-ACPrule.

NTSB, GHSA Leaders React Negatively to College Presidents’ Push for Lower Drinking Age

The acting chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board expressed his opposition last week to recent efforts by some college administrators to lower the nation’s drinking age from 21, which Congress in 1984 mandated states adopt or lose 10 percent of their federal highway funds.

“Age 21 drinking laws have been proven time and again effective in preventing deaths and injuries,” Mark Rosenker said in a news release issued by the board. “Repealing them is a terrible idea. It would be a national tragedy to turn back the clock and jeopardize the lives of more teens.”

The Governors Highway Safety Association has also reacted negatively to July’s announcement by a coalition of university presidents and other officials known as the Amethyst Initiative that they favor lowering the drinking age to reduce binge drinking and give drinking rights to young people already able to vote, enlist in the armed forces, and serve as jurors.

“We are dismayed that some college and university presidents have signed onto an initiative aimed at repealing this life-saving law,” GHSA Chairman Christopher Murphy of California said in a statement. “Both research and the hands-on experience of state highway safety agencies indicate that this law has saved countless lives. Underage drinking remains a serious problem that needs to be addressed, but lowering the drinking age would be a gigantic step backward for highway safety.”

Border Governors Exploring Private Financing Options for Toll Lanes at Crossings

Seeking to cut down on wait times at the U.S./Mexican border, governors are exploring the concept of public/private partnerships to construct vehicle toll lanes at entry points.

Governors from the four U.S. states and six Mexican states along the border concluded their annual summit two weeks ago in Los Angeles by agreeing the reduction of border crossing times must be a high priority. Delays of up to two hours for cars and four hours for commercial vehicles discourage tourism and other business, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said.

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff signaled a willingness to examine partnerships with private companies to develop new points of entry, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. Revenue from tolls could be used to repay construction bonds.

Will Kempton, California Department of Transportation director, said the tolling system would be an extension of current lanes dedicated to passenger and commercial vehicles that have paid to pre-register so they can move through crossings faster.

Transportation Librarians Roundtable Holds Next Webconference Thursday

The next presentation of the Transportation Librarians Roundtable, a monthly webconference series, will take place at 2 p.m. EDT Thursday, Sept. 11.

The featured speaker is Matt Barrett of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Library. The title of his presentation is “Transforming Numbers and Needs into Support.”

Those wishing to participate can do so by accessing fhwa.acrobat.com/translibrarian. Please visit tinyurl.com/TLR-Test to help ensure that your system is properly configured for participation in the webconference. The teleconference number for accessing the audio portion of the session is 218-339-7800; the passcode 958303.

The roundtable, which is held the second Thursday of each month, is sponsored by AASHTO, the National Transportation Library, the Transportation Research Board, and the Special Libraries Association’s Transportation Division. The roundtable’s purpose is to provide librarians and others involved in transportation research with opportunities to learn more about issues of mutual concern and interest.

STATES IN BRIEF

Kansas Panel Proposes Lowering Speed Limits to Reduce Greenhouse-Gas Emissions

The Kansas Energy Council is considering a proposal to reduce the speed limit on some Kansas highways to reduce the state's emissions of gases linked by many scientists to global warming.

Council members are soliciting public comments on lowering the state's maximum speed limit of 70 mph to 65 mph – what it was prior to elimination of federal speed limits in 1995. The proposal would also double fines for speeding and reduce the grace period for a moving violation from more than 10 mph over the limit to more than 5 mph over the limit, the Associated Press reported.

Bruce Snead, chairman of the council's Greenhouse Gases Subcommittee, said the idea is to reduce emissions through more-efficient driving.

But the proposal has been lambasted by many legislators, who note Kansas Department of Transportation data show motorists drive an average of 78 mph on highways where the speed limit is 70. Kansans often must travel long distances and will not heed efforts to slow them down in the interest of reducing a few pounds of carbon-dioxide emissions from their automobiles, opponents contend. Lawmakers considered increasing the maximum speed limit to 75 mph in 2004 but the House and Senate could not agree on a bill.

Colorado Tollway to No Longer Accept Coins and Bills

A toll road in Colorado will be among the first in the nation to completely eliminate tollbooths and use open-roll tolling.

The E-470 Public Highway Authority voted this month to eliminate all cash toll collections along the 46-mile toll road that arcs east of Denver and Aurora, the *Denver Business Journal* reported. Booths will be removed effective July 2009.

About 70 percent of tolls on E-470 are currently paid electronically with EXpressToll transponders. Remaining customers pay with cash and coins, which the authority says are expensive to collect and process.

Once booths are removed, cameras will snap photos of the license plates of vehicles passing toll areas without an EXpressToll transponder. The registered owner of the vehicle will receive a bill in the mail for the amount of tolls owed. Failure to pay by the due date will subject the owner to violation charges.

Illinois Cracks Down on Truckers Trying to Avoid Paying Fuel Taxes

Higher fuel costs are causing a growing number of Illinois truckers to illegally fill their rigs' tanks with untaxed diesel fuel intended strictly for off-highway vehicles, the Illinois Department of Revenue said last week in announcing stepped-up enforcement efforts.

The department's Bureau of Criminal Investigations has already taken action this year against 117 trucks using off-highway diesel fuel, which contains a red dye and is exempt from state and federal motor-fuel taxes totaling 45 cents per gallon. That's more violations than the bureau found in all of 2007 (111) or 2006 (46), the Bureau of National Affairs reported.

Also last week, an Illinois appellate court rejected a trucking firm's assertion that it was not obligated to pay the state's fuel tax on diesel burned while trucks engaged in off-highway activities such as idling at truckstops and during loading and unloading. The 1st District Appellate Court affirmed a lower court's ruling that barred U.S. Xpress Leasing Inc. from collecting a tax refund from the Department of Revenue.

Oklahoma-based U.S. Xpress filed a refund claim with Illinois tax officials in 2003 stating that in 2001 and 2002, it burned while idling off-highway 581,145 gallons of diesel fuel purchased in the state. The company had sought a refund of \$124,946 for taxes paid on those gallons.

Chicago Commuter-Rail Riders to Find Fewer Restrooms, More Seats

Facing the third consecutive year of record ridership but with no money to buy new passenger cars, Chicago's commuter-rail operator plans to remove bathrooms from 337 cars to make room for more than 2,000 new seats.

Metra announced last week it will reduce the number of cars with bathrooms from 60 percent to 50 percent as a way to accommodate more riders. The new seats could bring the agency an estimated \$7.5 million in additional fare revenue and save it \$2 million in maintenance and cleaning costs, the *Chicago Tribune* reported.

The commuter line will remove lavatories from some of its older cars as they are rehabbed. Metra Chairwoman Carole Doris will use the issue to ask the General Assembly and Gov. Rod Blagojevich to approve money to purchase new cars.

Also last week, Metra announced it will shut down its remaining 10 bar cars – meaning some passengers might not need a bathroom as much as they once did.

Travelers No Longer Able to Surf the Internet at Washington State Rest Areas

The Washington State Department of Transportation discontinued wireless Internet access at 28 rest areas Monday because of poor subscription numbers.

Wi-Fi hotspots were established at most of the state's rest stops in 2006. WSDOT contracted with two private companies to provide the service and share revenue. Travelers had to purchase a subscription to use the Internet except for checking road conditions and other information on the department's website. Those serves were offered free of charge.

“With people already having Internet access on cellphones and other wireless devices, the number of subscribers didn't meet up to projected use estimates,” Doug Pierce, WSDOT's rest area maintenance manager, said in a department news release announcing the service cut-off.

WSDOT is able to take ownership of the system hardware. It is looking how it might use the system in the future to provide electronic messaging at rest areas for road conditions and travel alerts.

AASHTO IN BRIEF

Research and Technology Committee Appointments Announced

[AASHTO President Pete Rahn has appointed Sandra Larson as chair of the Research Advisory Committee and Kevin Chesnik as chair of the Technology Implementation Group.](#)

Larson works as director of the Research & Technology Bureau at the Iowa Department of Transportation in Ames. Chesnik is administrator of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in Madison. Both will serve terms starting today and lasting through the association's 2010 annual meeting.

JOB POSTINGS

FHWA Seeks to Fill Three Senior Executive Positions

The Office of Safety Integration director serves as the Federal Highway Administration's leader in directing roadway safety strategic and performance planning efforts, integrating FHWA safety programs and issues with other key FHWA and U.S. Department of Transportation policies and initiatives, and managing the design, implementation, and delivery of programs that advance the adoption of highway safety-related and market-ready technologies and innovations. For the full job description and to apply, visit tinyurl.com/FHWA01. The deadline is Sept. 15.

The Office of Legislative Affairs & Policy Communications director is responsible for leading, assessing, and directing the development, implementation, and coordination of FHWA policy on federal legislation to include the linking of policy and legislative proposals with program office goals and budget processes. In addition, the incumbent serves as the agency's liaison to the transportation community on issues regarding highway policy and legislative initiatives. For the full job description and to apply, visit tinyurl.com/FHWA02. The deadline is Sept. 18.

The assistant chief counsel for legislation and regulations serves as the principal attorney for FHWA in all matters relating to the agency's legislative and regulatory programs. The incumbent is one of the principals in the U.S. Department of Transportation responsible for major legislation concerning priority transportation issues including drafting of transportation acts and preparing formal statements for the secretary of transportation, the FHWA administrator, and other U.S. DOT officials for delivery at congressional hearings. For the full job description, visit tinyurl.com/FHWA03. The deadline is Sept. 15.

All three positions are located in Washington and have a minimum starting salary of \$114,468.