



The Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin is a statewide nonprofit organization that advocates building and maintaining an efficient, reliable and interconnected transportation system that addresses our state's needs for safe mobility and economic growth.

## March 2010

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## Senate Jobs Bill Offers Long-Term Extension

The roller coaster that has been the extension of the surface transportation programs takes a turn upward under the Senate jobs bill, which the House passed with minor amendments in early March.

The \$15 billion Senate jobs bill – the HIRE Act (Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment) – does not include any additional transportation investment but does include the following important transportation provisions:

- Authorization for the highway and transit programs at the 2009 investment levels through December 31, 2010;
- A \$20 billion transfer from the general fund to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) to allow

Highway and Transit Accounts to maintain current levels through December 2010 and

- Restoration of lost contract authority from the \$8.7 billion rescission SAFETEA-LU required on September 30, 2009.

SAFETEA-LU expired on September 30, 2009. Congress has since passed four separate short-term extensions. The most recent extension – through March 28th – was passed only after the last extension was allowed to expire for the first two days in March, due to a filibuster by Senator Bunning (R-KY).

The bill now must go back to the Senate, hopefully for a final vote.

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# Executive Perspective

By Craig Thompson, TDA Executive Director

## The Filibuster is Over but the Lesson Lives On

Incredible as it seems, the nation's most important source of surface transportation funding was allowed to lapse at the beginning of this month for the first time in its history, due to a bizarre argument at the federal level in which, somehow, both sides were simultaneously right – and dead wrong.

On one side of the argument, a single Senator took a stand for paying for core government responsibilities and against continuing to descend further into debt. People on the other side of the argument said it was irresponsible to allow funding for programs that are universally supported, such as unemployment benefits, COBRA and transportation, to be shut off just so the Senator could score political points. Both sides are right.

Where they are both wrong is that neither side has stepped forward to offer solutions to actually fund our government, including transportation.

Historically, the federal government has funded surface transportation through six-year authorization bills. The most recent, known by the acronym SAFETEA-LU (for Surface Transportation Efficiency and Accountability Act – a Legacy for Users), expired on September 30th of last year. Since that time Congress has passed short-term measures to keep the program afloat for one or two months at a time, to buy time until Congress could get down to its business of passing a multi-year authorization.

The last short-term measure expired on February 28th, and attempts to extend the program by 30 more days were held up when U.S. Senator Jim Bunning (R-KY) filibustered. This led to a shutdown in reimbursements to states for highway projects and transit programs. About 2,000 federal transportation department employees were furloughed.

Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood responded to Senator Bunning's actions by stating, "As American families are struggling in tough economic times, I am keenly disappointed that political games are putting a stop to important construction projects around the country. This means that construction workers will be sent home from job sites because federal inspectors must be furloughed." Mr. LaHood, of course, was right.

Senator Bunning defended himself by saying, "There are going to be other bills brought to this floor that are not going to be paid for, and I'm going to object every time they do it.... I have got too many young grandchildren that want America to be the same America that I grew up in. And I'm worried to death that that's not going to be the case." Mr. Bunning made a very valid point.

Because both are right and wrong, though, we must turn our attention to solving the larger problem that this argument illustrated. And to do that, we have to return to more responsible times. While coming up with enough money in a responsible manner may be more difficult for other portions of the budget, it is actually quite simple when it comes to funding transportation. We simply need to charge users of the transportation system a fee that actually reflects the cost to maintain and upgrade that system. The user fee we currently have in place – the federal gas tax – remains at 18.4 cents a gallon, which is the same amount it was at in 1993 when gas prices were at \$1.11 per gallon.

In 1983, when the country was struggling to come out of a recession, President Reagan increased the gas tax by 5 cents stating, "We simply cannot allow this magnificent system to deteriorate beyond repair. The time has come to preserve what past Americans spent so much time and effort to create."

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## I-39/90 Coalition Formed

Groups interested in economic development and community revitalization along the Interstate 39/90 corridor between Beloit and Madison have formed a coalition to promote the enumeration of the project in state law. WisDOT reports that a study of adding a third lane in each direction and modernizing freeway interchanges is 99% complete. Despite the job-creation benefits, Wisconsin has not enumerated a single Major Project in the past eight years.

The I-39/90 Coalition is urging the Legislature to take advantage of available funds in the Major Highway Program to begin work on this corridor so that the Wisconsin communities that have been hit the hardest by the recession have the infrastructure tools they need to create jobs and rebuild their economies. They say this project should be front and center if “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” is going to be the top priority of the Legislature.

The effort is headed by Forward Janesville and is seeking support from all interests along the corridor.

Visit <http://congestioncorridor.com> to view the coalition website.

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In 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed another 5 cent increase in the gas tax. In 1993 President Clinton signed a 4.3 cent increase in the gas tax.

As evidenced by the actions of these three presidents, it was not that long ago that our leaders recognized that we all have a responsibility to pay for our transportation system.

Today, it has been deemed as more practical in the political sense to keep infusing money from our deficit-laden general fund in uncoordinated, halting and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to keep things moving than it would be to pass a multi-year authorization that actually raises the necessary revenue to efficiently plan and maintain a national system.

And yet a federal gas-tax increase of a dime a gallon would cost the average family only about \$9 a month. And it would be an equitable and responsible way to fund the safer and more economically beneficial transportation system we all need and deserve.

Some of the problems that face our nation in this day and age are truly confounding. Solving our transportation mess simply isn't one of them.

## RTA Hearings Scheduled

Four different Regional Transit Authority (RTA) bills are scheduled for a hearing in the Wisconsin State Assembly on March 11th. The Assembly Transportation Committee chaired by Representative John Steinbrink will hold a hearing on:

- Assembly Bill (AB) 723 creating an RTA in southeastern Wisconsin;
- AB 734 providing enabling language for an RTA to be formed in the Fox Cities;
- AB 791 providing enabling language for an RTA to be formed in La Crosse County and
- AB 282 introduced on behalf of the Legislative Council on RTA's which provides statewide enabling language to form an RTA.

This is the initial hearing for each of these bills. For any of these bills to pass this session will require passage by the Assembly Committee, the full Assembly and then passage by the appropriate Senate Committee and the full Senate by April 22nd.

## TIGER Grants Announced

In mid-February the U.S. Department of Transportation announced the recipients of the "TIGER" Grants – named for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery. Forty states received 51 grants totaling \$1.5 billion. At least \$56.6 billion in grants were requested by the states.

Wisconsin received one TIGER Grant totaling \$21.5 million to replace the Juneau Avenue bascule lift bridge and rehabilitate the Wisconsin Avenue lift bridge.

USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood stated, "This will help us meet the 21st century challenges of improving the environment, making our communities more livable and enhancing safety, all while creating jobs and growing the economy."

The breakout of TIGER Grants by both mode and region of the country is in the tables below.

Project Type	Millions	Share
Highway/Bridge	\$397.88	26.6%
Transit/ Pass. Rail	\$522.74	34.9%
Freight Mobility	\$494.79	33.0%
Intermodal Center	\$30.46	2.0%
Bike/Pedestrian	\$52.25	3.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,498.13</b>	<b>100%</b>

Region	Millions	Share
Northeast	\$304.35	20.3%
Central	\$422.03	28.2%
South	\$365.51	24.4%
West	\$406.24	27.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,498.13</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Transportation in the News

Indiana – A central Indiana task force is recommending imposing a local sales tax and building express toll lanes to fund a \$10 billion regional transportation plan. The task force is a private-sector collaboration of the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, and the Central Indiana Community Foundation.

A portion of the \$10 billion plan would be paid for out of the current \$8.9 billion, 25-year roadway expansion plan, deferring about \$600 million of previously planned local road projects and shifting that money to other infrastructure projects. The rest of the cost would be covered by revenues from a .35 percent to .5 percent local sales tax and building express toll lanes on state highways running through Indianapolis. Indiana's current sales tax rate is 7 percent.

Building the express toll lanes is projected to cost \$21 million and \$12.2 million annually to operate. The toll lanes are projected generate \$29 million annually in revenues.

The plan also calls for an expanded bus and rail system which would cost \$2.4 billion to build plus \$107 million to operate annually. Riders would pay for about 20 percent of annual operating costs, and \$56 million would come from the existing IndyGo bus system. New revenue from the sales tax would cover the rest.

Wyoming – The Wyoming State Senate passed a bill on Thursday authorizing \$350,000 to study installing tolls on Interstate 80. The bill passed on an 18-12 roll-call vote.

Supporters of the bill said it is necessary to show the Federal Highway Administration that the state is serious about pursuing a toll road.

Wyoming Department of Transportation officials said that a toll of \$30 per truck and \$3 per car would raise \$120 million, the equivalent of a 28 cent gas tax increase.

Gas Prices – Gas prices are expected to rise this summer. Crude oil prices continue to rise as demand grows in China. Experts say the corresponding increase in gasoline prices won't be far behind. Pump prices historically rise this time of year as refineries switch to a more expensive grade of gas. With gas already above \$2.60 across most of the state, experts say we can expect to see it top the \$3 mark in the upcoming months.

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## Interesting News Coverage

Winter 2010 CFIRE News now available <http://www.wistrans.org/cfire/news/newsletter/Winter2010.pdf>

Stateline.org February 25, 2010 – “The not-so-fast track for high-speed rail” <http://www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=463426>

Wall Street Journal February 17, 2010 – “Defections shake up climate coalition” <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704804204575069440096420212.html>

Planetizen.com February 11, 2010 – “Women, transit, and the perception of safety” <http://www.planetizen.com/node/42878>

USA Today February 11, 2010 – “Milwaukee airport wants to be considered Chicago's third one” [http://www.usatoday.com/travel/flights/2010-02-11-airmilwaukee11\\_CV\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/travel/flights/2010-02-11-airmilwaukee11_CV_N.htm)

CNNMoney.com February 10, 2010 – “High-speed rail: Skipping your town” [http://money.cnn.com/2010/02/09/news/economy/high\\_speed\\_rail/](http://money.cnn.com/2010/02/09/news/economy/high_speed_rail/)

## TDA Congratulates Contractors

TDA Congratulates contractors recognized for outstanding transportation work during the 2010 Contractor-Engineer Conference on January 20th in Madison. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation presented its annual Construction Awards to the following private-sector partners for outstanding work on transportation-related projects over the past year:

- Excellence in Grading - to Hoffman Construction of Black River Falls for grading work on US 41 in Marinette County. The \$26.7 million, four-mile project featured the use of global positioning equipment that enhanced productivity and project quality.
- Excellence in Asphalt Paving - Northeast Asphalt of Greenville won this award for work on US 45 in Shawano County. The \$6.1 million, 15-mile project pulverized and replaced pavement while keeping the highway open to traffic.
- Excellence in Concrete Paving - to Vinton Construction of Manitowoc for work on WIS 114 in Winnebago County. The \$2.2 million project reconstructed the highway and incorporated community sensitive design features to enhance an inner city neighborhood in Menasha.
- Excellence in Small Structures - Lunda Construction of Black River Falls received this award for work on the Allman Street Bridge over the Black River in the city of Medford. The \$700,000 project included aesthetic features such as a fieldstone surface treatment.
- Excellence in Large Structures - to Edward Kraemer & Sons of Plain for construction of a \$16.2 million, 10-span structure over the Fox River in Appleton. The bridge accommodates four 11-foot travel lanes, two bike shoulders and sidewalks.

- Specialty Award - Hoffman Construction received this award for work on the County A project in Lake Delton following floods that washed away the highway and drained the lake.
- Outstanding Airport Construction - to Zignego Company of Waukesha for a \$1.8 million project at the Southern Wisconsin Regional Airport in Rock County that included construction of a new 2,800-foot long parallel taxiway.

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State Budget Woes – State tax revenues declined by 4.1 percent during the final quarter of 2009, the fifth consecutive quarter of reduced collections, according to a report released by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York at Albany.

The report points out that the five straight quarters of decline represents a record length of such decreases. “States will likely face further revenue weakness in the first quarter of 2010,” said Lucy Dadayan author of the report.

Travel Up Slightly – Americans are estimated to have driven 2.932 trillion miles during 2009, which is a .2 percent increase over the previous year according to data released last week by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This slight increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) comes on the heels of a 3.4 percent drop in VMT the previous year – the first annual decline ever shown by FHWA which has collected estimates of American’s driving distances since 1984.

## Association Notes

### TDA is Moving

TDA will be moving March 17th. The move is not expected to interrupt TDA systems/operations for more than the day. TDA staff will be available by calling the main TDA phone line.

TDA's new address will be as follows:

10 E. Doty Street, Ste. 201  
Madison, WI 53703

Phone and fax numbers will not change:  
(phone) 608-256-7044 and (fax) 608-256-7079.

### Calendar of Events

TDA Fly-in to Washington, D.C. – March 10th-11th.

2010 Mid-Continent Transportation Research Forum hosted by the Wisconsin Transportation Center – August 19th-20th in Madison, Wisconsin. Click here for more information and to register.

*If you know of an upcoming event that would be of interest to TDA members, please forward information to the TDA office, [general@tdawisconsin.org](mailto:general@tdawisconsin.org).*

### Save these Dates

- TDA Drive-in – May 26th
- TDA Golf Outing – August 12th
- TDA Annual Meeting – October 19th

*Visit the events page on the TDA website, [www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), for event details and any future changes in the schedule.*

### Save on AAA Membership, Auto & Home Insurance



Visit the AAA website for a listing of membership benefits. You'll also be eligible for high-quality auto and home insurance coverage through AAA at a discounted TDA group rate too. Keep in mind, even if you already have AAA membership or insurance through AAA, you can save even more under this group plan. Enrollment is convenient through a statewide network of AAA offices.

Go to [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com) or call 1-800-236-1300 to find an office near you.

To receive your AAA discount provide your AAA group number TRN003.

Join today and take advantage of the great benefits and savings.

## TDA Welcomes Returning Member

Outagamie County Regional  
Airport