



# Officials find something to agree on: more money for faster freight

**GREG HINZ** ON POLITICS

An unusual line-up of local officials that includes both conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats—and the chiefs of seven counties in metropolitan Chicago—have written Congress to urge more money be spent to eliminate freight bottlenecks here.

They suggest "at least \$2 billion" a year nationally, with a good chunk of it for the greater Chicago area.

The letter, dated yesterday, was sent to the chairman and ranking Democrat of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Oklahoma Republican Jim Inhofe and California Democrat Barbara Boxer. The officials note that Congress continues to work on a long-term surface transportation funding bill, with the latest extension due to expire July 31.

The last effort to develop a national freight policy "missed opportunities to comprehensively address freight network challenges by limiting this preliminary work to highways," the letter said. What's needed instead is an intermodal approach that allocates money "regardless of whether (the recipients) are road, rail or port projects."

Beyond that, "we encourage you to greatly expand the freight work included" in a new bill, the letter says. "Over 925 million tons of freight worth \$1.3 trillion move directly into and out of the Chicago region each year. Freight bottlenecks in our region slow down the entire national transportation network and cost people and business money."

Not only do the local officials ask for more money for highway and freight rail work, they want a new program to focus on major metropolitan areas such as Chicago. Any program "should recognize the outsized role Chicago plays in our national freight system."

Signators include Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Will County Chief Executive Lawrence Walsh, both Democrats, and DuPage Chairman Dan Cronin, a Republican. Among others on the list are Kane County Chair Chris Lauzen and Lake County Chair Aaron Lawlor—both cost-cutting tea party Republicans—and Chicago Transportation Commissioner Rebekah Scheinfeld.

The letter was drafted by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and signed by its board chair, Gerald Bennett. It carefully avoids talking about the big hold-up in Washington: how to pay for a new multiyear plan.

But it's not very often that so many people on both sides of the aisle get together behind something like this here. We'll see if it helps.