

Statewide call growing for sustainable transportation revenues



The public deserves a safe and reliable transportation system, and we need a new kind of capital bill to get us there. We cannot afford business as usual. To rebuild and modernize the transportation system and ensure transportation dollars are spent wisely, Illinois requires a long-term funding solution that is sustainable, accountable, fair, equitable, and flexible.

Other states are far ahead of the State of Illinois in raising revenues to support infrastructure projects—giving them a competitive edge over us. It will take at least \$4 billion more per year to put our roads, bridges, transit, and intercity rail in good condition within a decade. But the cost of inaction is even higher—bridges in Illinois have deteriorated so much that safety is in question for some of them, and transit agencies face having to shut down service on lines they can't maintain. An immediate focus on the transportation system is required to avert a crisis. Now is the time to fix this problem.

We believe the following principles are essential to any transportation revenue proposal:

Sustainable – A long-term solution that can adapt to changing circumstances

New transportation revenues must provide sufficient and sustainable funding to improve, enhance, and expand Illinois' transportation systems. New funding, as well as existing fares and tolls, should grow sustainably—such as by indexing rates to inflation—to keep pace with the costs of operating and improving the system, which inevitably increase over time. A capital bill should emphasize a pay-as-you-go program, sized to the revenues available, with the appropriate mix of bonding. And local governments should be empowered to raise their own transportation funding to supplement state revenues.

Accountable – Choose the projects with the greatest benefit

Past capital bills have funded many specific projects that were not carefully analyzed for their value or that did not address the most pressing needs. Taxpayers have to know their dollars are being directed to the projects that provide the greatest economic, environmental, safety, and equitable benefit. The legislation should require a transparent, data-driven process to choose projects.

Fair – User fees paid by those who most benefit from the system

Costs should be paid primarily by those who use the transportation system the most or derive the most benefit. Any new state revenue from transportation sources must go only to transportation purposes, as the Illinois Constitution requires, with auditing to assure compliance.

Equitable – Giving a leg up where it is needed

Investing in transportation can provide significant and lasting benefits to people and communities that have historically been excluded from the economy. Transportation projects can both increase access to jobs, education, and other necessities and provide employment opportunities in transportation professions. Agencies should prioritize projects that enhance mobility for people who have the fewest options today, bridge racial and socioeconomic divides, and remove barriers to economic opportunity. Workforce diversity initiatives should be a major part of new transportation funding programs. Public investment may be necessary to ensure that new technologies are deployed equally across our communities. To promote equity, revenue enhancements should reduce the burden of increased costs on lower income individuals or offset such costs through other tax strategies.

Flexible – Fund all modes, ensuring that transit's capital needs are met

Revenue must be allocated flexibly to improve not only the state's road network but also transit, intercity rail, bicycle, trails, pedestrian, and safety infrastructure to meet the needs of all users and to increase access to low-pollution and low-cost modes of transportation. Establishing a dedicated state revenue source for transit and increasing overall funding for transit is a particularly high priority. All users should contribute to maintaining the system, and be encouraged to use low-impact modes of transportation.