

## Report: Transit system needs overhaul

### Economy, jobs would benefit from reorganization, policy group says

By Richard Wronski, Tribune reporter

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**Like a bus with several drivers, the Chicago area's mass transit system has too many people at the wheel, each with different destinations in mind, concludes a new report that calls for a far-reaching overhaul of the region's transportation network.**

**Together, the four service boards are run by 47 different directors appointed by as many as 16 local and state elected officials with little incentive to invest time or money in such innovations as a universal-fare transit card or seamless connections, says** the public-policy group Chicago Metropolis 2020.

"Quite naturally, the members and staff of each service board focus on the needs of their own agency, support their own agency in the competition for money, guard their agency's autonomy, and tend to resist efforts by the (Regional Transit Authority) to coordinate and lead," the report said.

The web of road, rail, water and air transportation spun from Illinois' central geography and spread over the last two centuries is in peril due to recent decades of inattention, the organization says.

A system-wide overhaul is needed, according to the report, which calls for focusing "fresh eyes" on improving transportation — not as a goal in itself but as a means to produce economic growth and create long-term employment.

The 74-page study, "Building Our Economy: Transportation for a New Illinois," offers dozens of recommendations — some fresh, others raised elsewhere — intended to boost the economy and create jobs by making "smarter" public transportation investments.

**Among those proposals are two that would hit motorists directly in the pocketbook and give legislators fits: doubling the state gasoline tax and earmarking a portion of the new revenue for transit; and expanding the use of tolling and variable pricing to better manage traffic and pay for needed improvements.**

These recommendations echo key parts of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's strategic plan, scheduled for final approval in October.

The transit system suffers from inefficient organization, **meager financial support and feeble state policies**, stifling the first-class transportation network the region needs to compete in the global economy, the report says.

"The right thing to do now is to get to work as quickly and efficiently as we can to re-create and redesign our transportation system to build a future of expanding prosperity for everyone in Illinois," the report's foreword says. The full report is scheduled to be available Sunday at <http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org>.

Illinois families and businesses spend \$100 billion a year on personal and freight transportation, the report notes. Reducing these private costs could free up billions to help families meet their needs and make businesses healthier, the report contends.

The report urges a reorganization of the region's transit system. The four governing boards — the Regional Transportation Authority, the CTA, Metra and Pace — are "caught in an unwieldy organizational structure that impedes coordination," the report says.

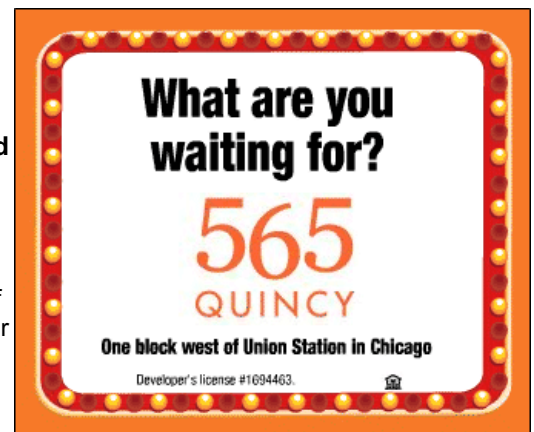
The RTA, intended to be the oversight agency, "has made sincere efforts but has had little success in improving service coordination," the report says.

The report calls for "leadership discussions" on the RTA's role, the possibility of merging organizations, coordinating fares and services and developing permanent funding sources for capital improvements.

It also urges a revision of the state's formula for funding mass transit.

"Obviously, something like this is complicated and controversial — change always is," said Frank Beal, Chicago Metropolis 2020's executive director. "We focused on the 16 elected officials who make the 47 appointments, and challenged them to come together and see if they can create what the citizens of the region deserve."

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Beal said the report intentionally offers no specific model for how the transit system should be reorganized, a subject that experts and lawmakers in Springfield have grappled with ever since the RTA was created in the early 1970s.

Nevertheless, the report noted, "It is time they try again."

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