



**Regional
Transportation
Authority**

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HOUSE COMMITTEE APPROVES BILL TO FUND MASS TRANSIT *Bipartisan group of legislators takes action to prevent doomsday plans for CTA, Metra and Pace*

CHICAGO -- A strong, bipartisan coalition of the Illinois House Committee on Mass Transit approved a transit funding and reform proposal by a 15-4 vote yesterday. The comprehensive, balanced plan, Senate Bill 572, would implement recommendations for reform at the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and the transit agencies and provide funds to address operating shortfalls at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace. Funds are needed to avoid drastic fare hikes, service cuts and layoffs that are scheduled to occur in mid September.

“Over the last year, the entire region has sent a strong message to Springfield about the need to invest in mass transit,” said Jim Reilly, Chairman of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). “The committee’s action shows that our voice is being heard.”

The vote came on the heels of Tuesday’s rally to save mass transit, which drew a crowd of hundreds and was led by a bipartisan coalition of regional leaders, including Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and DuPage County Chairman Bob Schillerstrom.

Chair of the House Committee on Mass Transit, State Representative Julie Hamos (D-Evanston), sponsored Senate Bill 572. Chair Hamos said the plan would fill operating shortfalls at the region’s transit agencies and allocate money equitably across CTA, Metra and Pace services. The bill now moves to the floor of the Illinois House for approval.

“We are encouraged by the support shown by the committee,” noted Steve Schlickman, RTA Executive Director. “City and suburban legislators understand how important it is for us to act soon to provide the needed funding.”

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Last week, the RTA board of directors approved contingency plans for the transit system that would cut services, increase fares, cut jobs and defer capital investments and maintenance projects indefinitely. Without additional funding, those changes will take effect on September 16.

Transit officials say the so-called “doomsday” scenario would jeopardize the region’s economy, lead to greater congestion on roads, degrade air quality and strand thousands who rely on public transit everyday.

RTA Executive Director Steve Schlickman said the House vote gives him hope that his agency will not be forced to impose such massive service cuts.

“The General Assembly realizes how public transportation benefits our entire region,” said Schlickman. “Investing in our region’s transit system can help reduce pollution and improve our quality of life.”

Transit proponents say that the bipartisan legislation echoes more than 25,000 emails and letters from residents throughout the six-county region to their legislators as well Senate and House leadership. The transit system includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties.

DuPage County Chairman Bob Schillerstrom, along with other key Republicans, lent his support to the bill. “This is not a city issue or a suburban issue,” said Schillerstrom, speaking at yesterday’s rally. “It’s a quality of life and economic development issue.”

The Illinois House will convene to vote on the transportation bill on September 4.

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About the RTA: The RTA provides financial oversight, funding and regional planning for the three public transit operations in northeastern Illinois: The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus and train, Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit. For more information, visit www.rtachicago.com and www.MovingBeyondCongestion.org.