

Capital Plan & Mass Transit Funding Critical to a Strong Business Environment

As reported in today's Arlington Heights Post, plans for the STAR Line could be scrapped if the state does not make an adequate investment in mass transit through funding legislation and a long-term capital program.

For the past several months, the Illinois General Assembly has been debating funding legislation that will dictate the future of Northeastern Illinois' mass transit system. On Friday, November 2, Rep. Julie Hamos (D-Evanston) is expected to introduce a mass transit bill in an effort to prevent service cuts and fare hikes for the service agencies, including Metra.

While this is an important step to secure mass transit funding, this does NOT include a capital improvement plan. If Illinois legislators fail to provide additional funding for a capital program, Metra will suffer a loss of billions of dollars in matching federal funding for projects like the STAR Line and would be forced to cease future planning.

As a business leader and member of the STAR Line Business Alliance, we need your support by contacting and encouraging your state elected officials to pass long-term mass transit and a capital program to ensure continued planning of the STAR Line. Our region's economic engine depends on mass transit and your voice as a business leader will resonate loudly in Springfield. The STAR Line Business Alliance is calling on you to make your voices heard.

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR TODAY

Contact your legislator today and urge them to:

- Pass mass transit funding legislation
- Pass a capital bill that will invest in the STAR Line and attract billions in federal matching dollars

The STAR Line is important because it will:

- Provide a safe, reliable transportation option to nearly 1.6 million residents who live in an area of high congestion
- Give close to 1.2 million employees an alternative to driving
- Link to major economic business centers, universities and hospitals
- Attract new businesses eager to take advantage of access to a Metra line
- Initially connect nearly 100 communities, filling a critical void for inter-suburban rail service and providing new service in areas currently without direct access to passenger rail service.

Visit <http://capwiz.com/metraconnect/home/> to send a letter to your legislator

STAR Line dream could die with lack of state funds

October 26, 2007

By Matt Kiefer, Arlington Heights Post

Plans to build the proposed STAR Line commuter train system will completely derail unless state government invests needed money into mass transit, Metra officials announced Oct. 25.

While unveiling its 2008 budget and five-year capital program, Metra disclosed that it has only \$5 million left to spend on STAR Line planning. Without additional funding, that money will run out by the end of next year, and the dream of an O'Hare-to-Joliet train line will disappear with it.

Metra has obtained millions of dollars in federal New Start grants to expand its service with new routes, including the STAR Line. But the Illinois legislature has gridlocked on mass transit funding for months with no end in sight, prompting Metra to draft emergency budget plans to deal with a projected \$40 million shortfall next year.

Part of Metra's plans include cutting off its investment in all expansion projects, and to redirect money only to essential operations and maintenance programs.

Once Metra abandons the STAR Line project, it cannot reclaim the federal grants later, according to executive director Philip Pagano.

"I think the New Starts, they're done," he said. "If we don't get new money by 2009, they're done."

Metra and suburban leaders have worked for more than five years planning the STAR Line service. The first rail line in the area designed exclusively for suburb-to-suburb service, it would start at O'Hare Airport and travel along the Northwest Tollway with stops in Des Plaines, Elk Grove Village, Arlington Heights, Rolling Meadows, Schaumburg and Hoffman Estates. It would then turn south on the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway, traveling through the western suburbs on the way to Joliet.