

Metra has been notified by the Federal Transit Administration that its New Start projects, including the STAR Line, have been put on hold pending a transit funding solution in Springfield. If the legislature doesn't come up with a state match in the near future, Illinois could lose \$1.5 billion of federal funding for the STAR Line, and other important transit projects including Metra's proposed SouthEast Service and expansion of existing service.

If Illinois does not come up with a local match, the federal government, seeing a lack of Illinois commitment, will move the money to other states. This would spell the end of the STAR Line and other critical suburban transportation projects. Yesterday, U.S. Reps. Melissa Bean and Mark Kirk called on state leaders to pass a capital program. Below is a sampling of media coverage

Visit <http://capwiz.com/metraconnect/home/> to send a letter to your elected officials today and urge them to pass a capital program that guarantees state funds for the STAR Line.

## 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.

## Transit gridlock may put federal funding at risk; Metra projects could lose up to \$1.5 billion

By Richard Wronski, Chicago Tribune  
December 12, 2007

The legislative deadlock over state funding for mass transit may jeopardize federal dollars for major commuter rail improvements in the Chicago region, two Illinois congressmen and the head of Metra warned Tuesday.

Illinois could lose up to \$1.5 billion for the proposed expansion of Metra service, including the suburb-to-suburb STAR line; SouthEast Service to South Cook and Will Counties; and expansion of the Union Pacific Northwest and West lines into McHenry and DuPage Counties, U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk and Melissa Bean said.

The federal government has put these so-called New Start projects on hold for 30 to 45 days pending a resolution of the months-long transit funding stalemate in Springfield, Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano said.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich and top lawmakers have been deadlocked for months on legislation to provide additional funding for mass transit. Metra, the CTA and Pace will impose service cuts and fare hikes Jan. 20 without new money.

The Federal Transit Administration confirmed the projects are being frozen. "The FTA is waiting to see a reliable source of local funding," spokesman Paul Griffo said. "Once that's demonstrated, the projects would be ready for advancement."

If Illinois does not come up with matching funds – anywhere

from 20 to 50 percent – the FTA could re-allocate the federal money to other states, Kirk said.

"The bottom line is this: California, Florida [and] Texas do not suffer from this kind of political gridlock," Kirk said. "Our inaction in Springfield could lead to a huge windfall for other states."

The CTA and Pace also have New Start projects. But Kirk, a Republican from Highland Park, and Bean, a Democrat from Barrington, focused their concern on Metra's plight. The Suburban Transportation Commission they created in April concluded that Illinois' transit system "does not adequately address the needs of suburban communities, both in service and direct funding."

Kirk warned state leaders "there is a federal deadline pending" and suggested they lock themselves in a room to negotiate. "They can either kill themselves or come out with a bipartisan solution," he said.

The competition for scarce federal dollars is especially keen, and the representatives' warnings were "not an idle threat," said Michael McLaughlin, transportation director for the Metropolitan Planning Council, an independent non-profit planning organization.

The FTA is looking to Illinois to provide a "steady, stable stream of revenue" to match the federal dollars, McLaughlin said. "If we don't get our act together, we won't get any money at all."

# State gridlock threatens federal transit funds

## *Without Springfield agreement, matching grant program will be derailed*

By Marni Pyke, Daily Herald  
December 12, 2007

Gridlock in Springfield will mean gridlock on suburban highways, with \$1.5 billion in public transit improvements in jeopardy, federal lawmakers warned Tuesday.

U.S. Reps. Melissa Bean and Mark Kirk added their voices to a growing chorus critical of the General Assembly's failure to pass a capital projects program.

Without a capital budget that guarantees state funds, matching federal dollars for improving two key Metra Union Pacific routes and building the STAR line to connect Cook, DuPage and Will counties are at risk, both cautioned during a news conference with Metra officials.

About \$1.5 billion in federal aid is at stake, said Kirk, a Highland Park Republican.

"Inaction in Springfield will lead to a huge windfall for other states that have their act together," he said.

Bean, a Barrington Democrat, added, "Mass transit is critical to suburban areas to ease congestion, improve the environment and open opportunities for those unable to drive."

The General Assembly has gone into overtime as leaders struggle to find common ground on a capital projects bill and funding for the cash-strapped Regional Transportation Authority.

Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano said the Federal Transit Administration told him improvements to the Union Pacific West and Northwest lines, were on hold until the state paid its share.

That means delays in fixing the so-called "commuter railroad Hillside Strangler" in Chicago where the Union Pacific-West and three other lines converge.

Metra planned to modernize the bottleneck, which was necessary before constructing the STAR line. Now, all these projects are threatened, as is Metra's overall performance, Pagano said.

"Remember what it was like in early 1982 and 1983 when our on-time performance was 76 percent?" he asked. "We had cars where you could look down at the floor and see road bed. If there's not a capital bill, it won't be long for that to reappear."

Officials with the Federal Transit Administration would not comment on political issues or confirm that federal dollars would be yanked if no state funding was forthcoming soon.

But an agency spokesman said the FTA told Metra last week it was ready to proceed with preliminary engineering on the Union Pacific work but needed to see a reliable local source of funding first.

On Monday, House Speaker Michael Madigan proposed a massive gambling expansion program that would fund new capital projects. Gov. Rod Blagojevich and other state leaders are reviewing the plan, a spokesman said.

State Rep. Julie Hamos, an Evanston Democrat who has sought to increase RTA funding, said the criticism of the General Assembly was warranted but was hopeful a solution is in sight.

"I believe there is movement as we get closer to a transit doomsday," she said.

Bean and Kirk also unveiled a report by the Suburban Transportation Commission, a coalition of transportation agencies plus state and local officials. The study found the state's mass transit systems are inadequate for the growing needs of suburban commuters.

# State budget crisis threatens fed transit fund

Lake County News-Sun  
December 12, 2007

The Illinois Legislature's budget crisis is now threatening federal funding that was secured for state transit and road projects, U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park and Melissa Bean, D-Barrington, said Tuesday.

In a bipartisan warning issued in Chicago, Bean and Kirk said the lack of a state capital budget bill means that funds secured for Illinois in the latest federal Transportation Act approved in 2005 could go elsewhere.

"Competing states do not suffer from the political gridlock of the Illinois state government. Unless we act soon, Springfield's inability to match federal funds will provide a golden opportunity for states like California, Texas and Florida to use monies which would have come here," Kirk said.

"The Illinois delegation secured these funds in 2005 because we knew these projects were vital for the suburbs and the region as a whole," Bean said. "I hope our state leaders can come together in a bipartisan way, as the congressional delegation did, to find a solution."

"In the last transportation bill, Illinois won more approvals for federal funds than any other state," Kirk said. "That congressional victory may be squandered unless Illinois state officials find a way to match Federal Transit Administration funds."

That warning applies to any state transit or road projects dependent on federal matching funds to move forward. If the state money is not available when the federal funding is ready for dispersal, the federal funding may go elsewhere, officials said.

Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano said that two Metra expansion projects are being impacted due to a lack of state matching grants.

Preliminary engineering has been stopped on improvements needed for the two projects – the Suburban Transit Access Route (STAR) line that would link northwest and west suburbs to O'Hare/downtown, and the Union Pacific-Northwest line expansion project.