

Signed by:

E. Hoy McConnell, II
**Business and Professional People
for the Public Interest**

Dia Cirillo
**Center for Tax and Budget
Accountability**

George A. Ranney
Chicago Metropolis 2020

Randall S. Blankenhorn
**Chicago Metropolitan Agency
for Planning**

Rob Sadowsky
**Chicagoland Bicycle Federation
and the Healthy Streets
Campaign**

R. Eden Martin
**Civic Committee of The
Commercial Club of Chicago**

John Norquist
Congress for the New Urbanism

Mahender Vasandani
**Congress for the New Urbanism
-Illinois Chapter**

Rev. Sid L. Mohn
Heartland Alliance

Clarence N. Wood
**Jane Addams Hull House
Association**

W. James Farrell
(Retired Chairman & CEO)
Illinois Tool Works Inc.

Paul L. Snyder
KPMG LLP

MarySue Barrett
Metropolitan Planning Council

Rick Harnish
**Midwest High Speed Rail
Association**

Gerald W. Adelman
Openlands Project

Rev. Alexander Sharp
**Protestants for the Common
Good**

Edward Paesel
**South Suburban Mayors and
Managers Association**

Mayor Gerald Bennett
**Southwest Conference of
Mayors**

Jacky Grimshaw
Transit Future

Transit for Northeastern Illinois

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To the Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

We urge you to pass SB 572.

This legislation provides funds for transit operations and includes needed reforms of the RTA and important changes to the CTA's pension and health care programs. SB 572 directly addresses the Illinois Auditor General's recommendations for reform and funding. It should be passed immediately and should not be linked to passage of a capital bill.

SB 1110, the Senate's version of a capital bill is entirely inadequate and needs to be substantially revised.

First, the amount of capital allocated to transit in general and the RTA in particular in SB 1110 is shockingly low. The amount allocated is not even close to meeting the maintenance needs of the system. Failure to provide more capital dollars will send transit on a path of decline and deterioration that will have serious negative consequences for the region's economy.

Second, the \$200 million "loan" to the RTA from gaming revenue proposed in the Senate bill will not correct the RTA's basic funding problem. It would force the RTA literally to gamble that the General Assembly and Governor would agree to do something next year that they have not been able to do this year, and the RTA would face a much deeper hole and even more severe cuts next June.

Third, SB 1110 is a grab bag of projects. It lacks a coherent sense of purpose or direction. It does not provide a transparent process for decision making or clear criteria for spending the billions of public dollars involved most effectively.

Fourth, opinions differ on whether a capital bill should be built on the foundation of gambling. If gaming revenues are rejected or are insufficient, we urge you to raise capital for transportation from its users and beneficiaries. Such revenues could include reasonable increases in both state and regional gas taxes, motor vehicle registration fees, drivers' license fees, and transit fares. Our current state motor fuel tax, 19 cents per gallon, is at the mid-point of all of the states; forty-three states have raised their gas tax since Illinois last increased it in 1990. We strongly recommend gas taxes, or other user fees, in order to provide a solid foundation for Illinois' transportation capital needs.

Failure to support the region's transit system with operating and capital dollars plus needed reforms will cost the regional economy more than \$2 billion per year.

We can't afford that.