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NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich signs law to strengthen, streamline transportation and land use planning in Northeast Illinois

*New agency has broad backing from City and Suburban leaders;
Goal is more effective investment of public and private funds*

SPRINGFIELD – Heralding a new era in regional planning and cooperation, Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich today signed legislation combining separate transportation and land use planning agencies for northeastern Illinois into a single entity designed to protect natural resources and minimize traffic congestion as the seven county region plans for the 21st Century and beyond.

House Bill 3121, which creates the Regional Planning Board, was produced by a broad coalition of public and private sector leaders. It won unanimous support in the state Senate and House and was sponsored by Sen. Debbie Halvorson (D-Chicago Heights) and Rep. Suzanne Bassi (R-Palatine).

“As Northeastern Illinois continues to grow and communities expand, we need to make sure we’re planning ahead to accommodate the additional traffic and increased demand on our transit systems,” the Governor said. “By combining the region’s existing planning authorities into one board, we can maximize our limited resources and improve coordination on both transportation and land use needs for the entire region.”

The new agency is being created by the merger of the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), the region’s federally designated metropolitan planning organization since 1955, and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), the area’s comprehensive planning

agency since 1957. It will be led by a 15-member board appointed by mayors and top elected county officials in the region, with a third of the seats filled by Chicago, a third filled by suburban Cook County and a third filled by the collar counties of DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Will, Kane and Kendall. The composition highlights the expansion of the metropolitan area by including fast-growing Kendall in the regional planning process for the first time.

"Gov. Blagojevich's action today signals the beginning of a coordinated attack on the traffic jams that impact our region," said George A. Ranney, Jr., President and CEO of Chicago Metropolis 2020, one of the many civic groups that strongly supported the merger. "The business community believes that integrating transportation and development planning will make the region's economic climate even stronger, conserve our land resources and save tax dollars."

"Fighting traffic congestion is one of the Illinois Department of Transportation's top priorities," said IDOT Secretary Timothy W. Martin. "This unified planning approach will strengthen our hand as we compete for federal funding to upgrade our transportation infrastructure, in terms of roads and highways, rail service and mass transit."

"As our region continues to grow, both economically and in land area, it is imperative that we plan in a way that builds strong communities," said Sen. Halvorson. "Combining land use and transportation planning will enable northeastern Illinois to develop in a manner that improves our quality of life and takes full advantage of our transportation infrastructure."

"The consolidation of these two commissions into one Regional Planning Board will provide better coordination between local governments and transportation agencies, including IDOT, to develop the most effective land use and transportation plans for the Northeastern region," said Rep. Bassi. "The creation of this board has been in the works for a long time, and many people have been involved in the process. I am very pleased to see it finally come to fruition."

The Regional Planning Board will coordinate regional transportation and land use planning, identify regional priorities, serve as a single point of contact for the public and create an implementation strategy to be delivered to the General Assembly by September 2006. A four-fifths majority vote will be required for any Board action.

Decisions over local land use and zoning issues will remain in the hands of local governments.

The merger grew out of a recommendation by the Regional Transportation Task Force appointed in early 2004 by the Governor and legislative leaders to evaluate methods to improve transportation planning and program delivery in the six-county area. That Task Force, chaired by former Congressman William Lipinski, recommended combining the functions of the CATS and NIPC and creating a new board to better coordinate the activities of the two agencies.