

ASSESSMENT OF ILLINOIS' TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

2013

PREPARED FOR THE
TRANSPORTATION FOR ILLINOIS COALITION



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Illinois' vast transportation system is broken. The majority of the state's highways and bridges were built during the Eisenhower administration. Transit and rail lines border on disrepair, and the increased capacity needs of waterways and air transportation options require major upgrades, too. Without access to adequate funding, transportation conditions will continue to spiral downward.



If the state of Illinois fails to invest additional resources into a viable transportation plan by the year 2018, nearly 1 in every 3 miles of roads and 1 in every 10 bridges will be unacceptable. Currently, Chicago's CTA transit system is in such disrepair that its trains must slow down significantly while traveling through large defective rail sections to reduce undue stress on the system and assure public safety. Some CTA rail lines claim 30% of their total line is designated as "slow zones."

This deteriorating transportation system not only causes inconveniences and safety concerns for motorists and consumers, but it also creates a devastating setback to the state's economy. The ability to move goods in an efficient and timely manner is vital to a growing and robust economy because prosperous and productive communities attract and retain businesses.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the existing need to sustain Illinois' current transportation system and compare that to available resources. More importantly, this paper is designed to begin a pointed and frank commentary on how to solve the crisis Illinois faces in assuring adequate funding for transportation infrastructure.

This discussion will focus on a firm commitment to restore monetary resources once designed to support transportation funding while protecting these resources from future diversion.

Illinois must look ahead to find new funding sources that will not only provide a large influx of cash through additional bonded capital but also dedicate sustainable sources of pay-as-you-go revenues to assure a consistent annual maintenance plan. New revenue sources must be evaluated to ensure they are neither declining nor stagnant but, rather, will grow with economic and inflationary pressures. The state must seek revenue sources that will provide the means to meet Illinois' transportation needs at both the state and the local levels.

Finally, this paper will explore smart and policy-oriented transportation capital programs which address the most critical needs – even if these programs are not the most politically popular.

The time is right for Illinois to adopt a new capital program. Revenues raised for the *Illinois Jobs Now!* program have fallen short of expectations and must be addressed. As a general rule, legislators dislike raising revenues; however, if necessary, it is better to raise revenue enough to provide for a positive and noticeable result.

Competition for additional capital funds will be arduous. The necessity for additional school construction is insatiable, the ramshackle condition of state-owned buildings is shameful, aging sewer and water systems must be upgraded and replaced statewide and, in this highly competitive world, economic development money is mandatory to entice new businesses and incent expansion of existing businesses.

Defining the Need

The State of Illinois' transportation needs are countless and overwhelming. The statewide system is old, neglected, and in major disrepair – a combination that borders on hopelessness. However, Illinois can initiate measures to fix and upgrade its crumbling highways, bridges, and rail systems to an acceptable, usable condition where continued maintenance thereafter is plausible.

Although the overall thought of transportation renovation is staggering, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that unwavering attention must focus on the basic, initial steps that will catapult Illinois' deplorable transportation situation back to satisfactory and state of the art conditions.

State Roads and Bridges

Illinois' highway system is enormous, claiming the nation's 3rd largest interstate system and the 3rd largest bridge inventory. In fiscal year 2011, vehicles traveled 103.4 BILLION miles throughout Illinois. The harsh reality is that a transportation system so large and so widely traveled must be diligently maintained and upgraded to prevent disrepair.

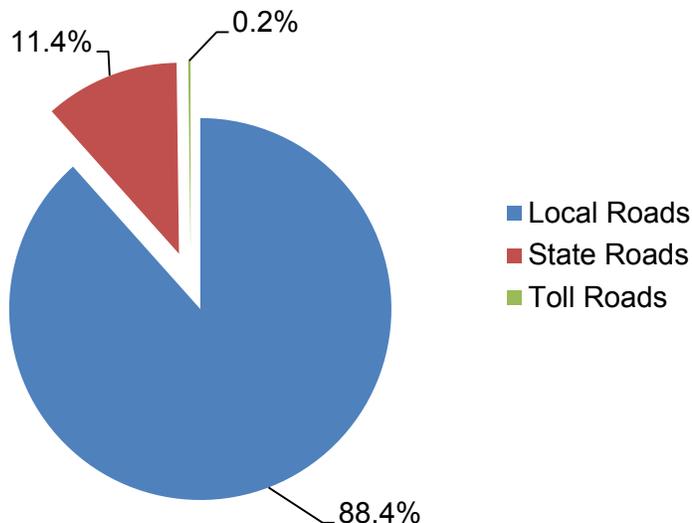
A well-maintained infrastructure provides not only convenience for the average commuter but is also essential to sustaining a viable economy. Many of us connect with each other by way of a well-kept, easily accessible transportation system. Employees and consumers travel highways and roads to get to work as well as gain access to the goods and services they wish to purchase. So, Illinois' highway system is central to facilitating our personal lives and is vital to a robust and functioning economy.

According to information provided by the Chicagoland Operators, poor state infrastructure costs average motorists \$292 per year in higher operating and repair costs for their vehicles. The same report estimates that \$8.2 billion in productivity is lost to motorists in northeastern Illinois alone due to traffic congestion. Poor infrastructure makes it difficult to attract or retain businesses and, therefore, the jobs these businesses create. Chicagoland Operators indicates that the failure to invest in infrastructure construction projects resulted in 31,900 fewer road construction-related jobs in fiscal year 2013 than were reported in fiscal year 2012.

Of the 140,762 miles of public roads in the State of Illinois, 123,448 miles (or 88.4%) of these roads are managed under local jurisdiction which includes municipalities, counties, townships, and road districts. The state of Illinois maintains jurisdiction over 16,019 miles (or 11.4%) of

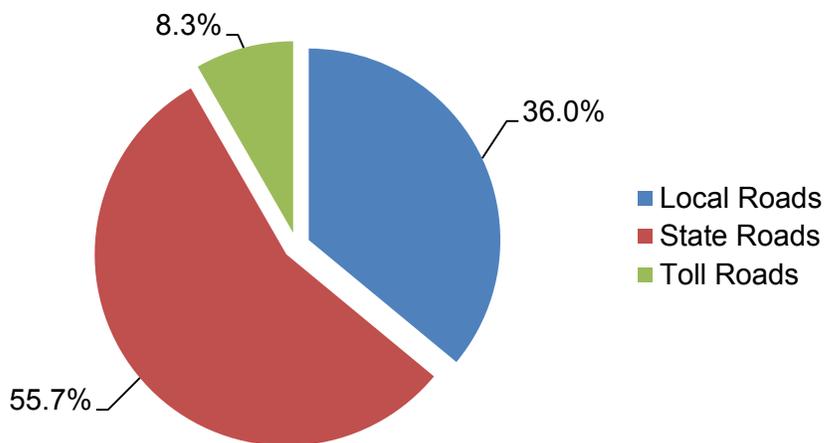
roads, including interstate systems, federal highways, and state highways. Finally, 295 miles (or 0.2%) are designated toll roads.

Centerline Road Miles



On a centerline road mile basis, local jurisdictions control a vast majority of the overall system. However, usage or vehicle miles traveled is a much different story. Based on usage, roads under state jurisdiction handle 55.7% of the traffic, while local roads carry 36%, and toll roads carry 8.3%.

Vehicle Miles Traveled



To summarize, state jurisdiction roads account for only 11.4% of the centerline road miles, but handle 55.7% of the vehicle miles traveled. Local roads account for a staggering 88.4% (nearly 9 in 10) of the centerline road mileage, but only 36% of vehicle miles traveled. Toll roads only account for 0.2% of the centerline miles, but 8.3% of vehicle miles traveled.

STATE HIGHWAY NEEDS

As mentioned above, the state maintains over 16,000 centerline miles of highway (43,000 lane miles) and nearly 7,900 bridges. Although these numbers only represent a little more than 11% of the total centerline miles, state highways carry nearly 56% of the statewide vehicle miles traveled.

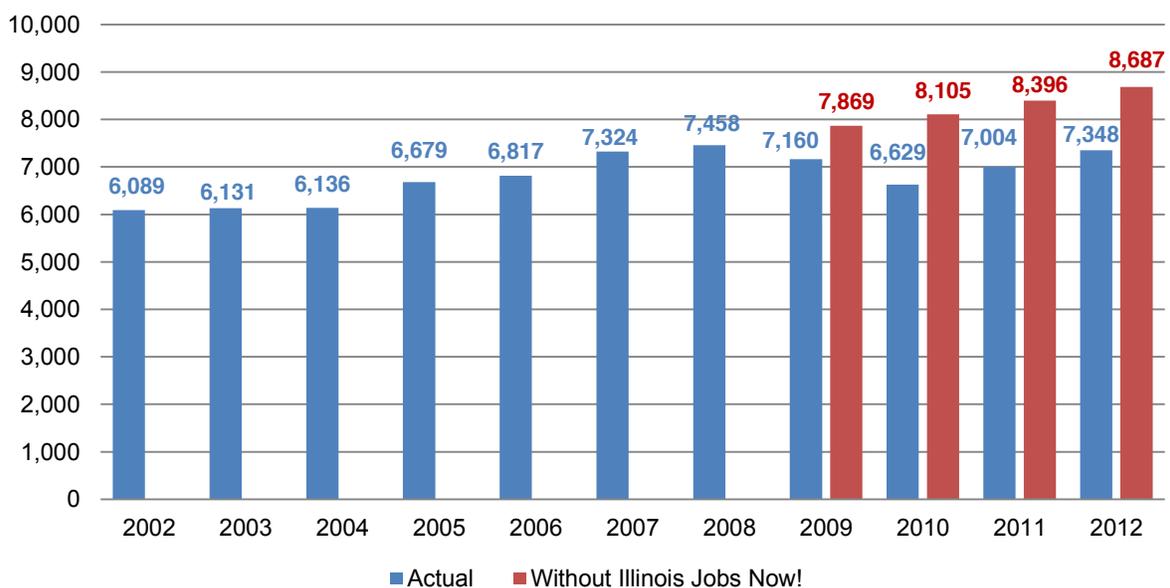
In 2007, a Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC) study calculated the total annual funding needed to maintain state jurisdiction roads and bridges at \$4.4 billion. Understanding the fiscal constraints facing the State of Illinois, TFIC recommended an annual program of \$3.520 billion. At that time, the actual estimated annual program was \$1.7 billion, or \$1.820 billion below the recommended program level and \$2.7 billion below the actual need. Despite the 2009 capital program benefits, transportation matters have only gotten worse and will continue to deteriorate without further action.

When assessing the condition of the state system of highways and bridges, 2 factors must be considered:

- **Backlog** – miles of highway or number of bridges currently in need of repair; postponing repairs will require more money in the future; and
- **Accruing** – miles of highway or number of bridges that will be backlogged throughout the course of a Multi-Year Plan.

Prior to the enactment of *Illinois Jobs Now!* (fiscal year 2009), the state faced a rapid increase in state highway construction needs. The projected backlog/accruing quantity of repair miles numbered 7,480 miles in fiscal year 2008 with predicted growth to 8,687 miles by fiscal year 2012. However, the infusion of money from the state bond program coupled with federal stimulus funds over the last 4 years has reduced the fiscal year 2012 estimate to 7,348 miles:

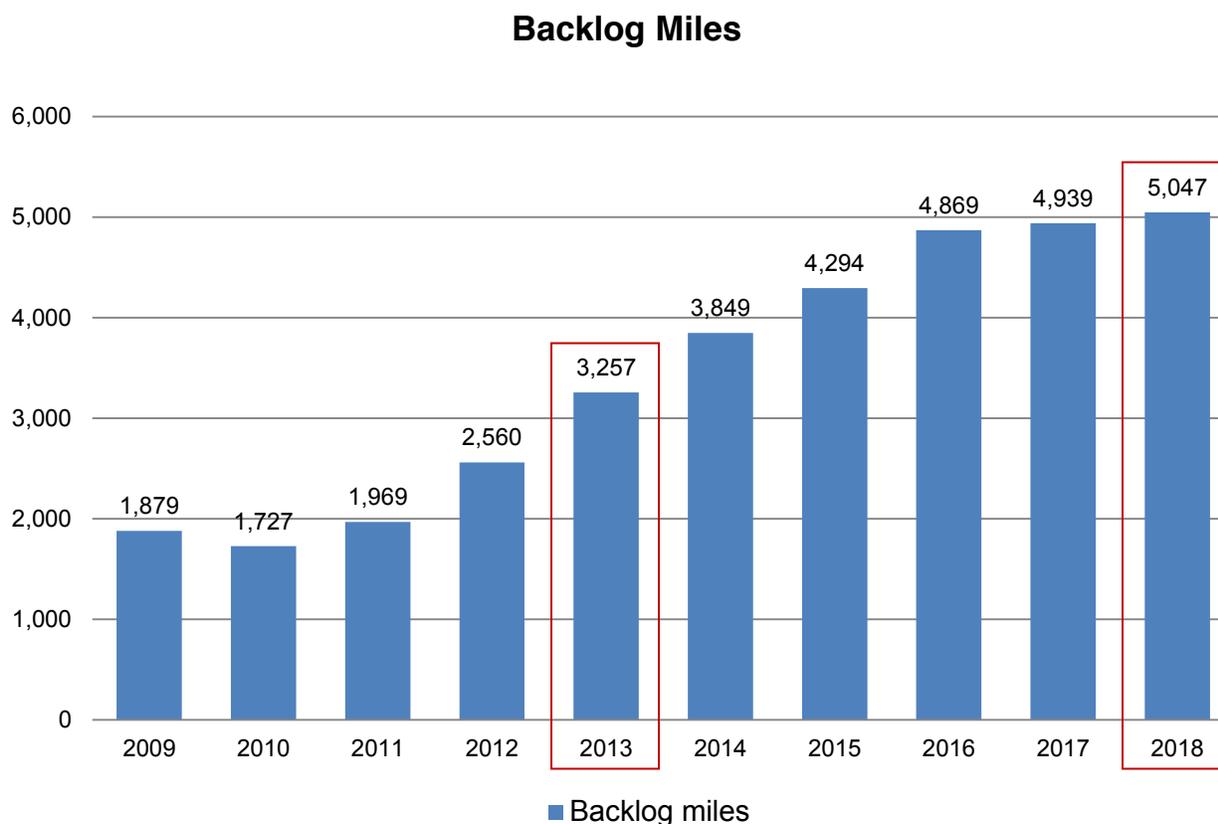
Backlog and Accrued 6-Year Needs (State System Miles)



Although *Illinois Jobs Now!* provided a much needed infusion of construction dollars, this 1-time federal funding plus the 2009 bond program are non-sustainable revenue sources and, thus, will

not help finance future construction. The transportation funding crisis was mitigated temporarily, but the backlog of need assessment reveals the state merely held steady during these years.

The most recent Highway Improvement Plan (fiscal year 2013 – fiscal year 2018) illustrates the following growth in the backlog miles:



To date, the 2013 backlog of 3,257 miles of state-maintained roads is the largest the State of Illinois has ever experienced. The predicted fiscal year 2018 backlog of 5,047 miles will be nearly double the number in fiscal year 2012.

The backlog, however, is only half the story. Assuming a 20-year life span for roads, the accruing need over the same time span will amount to 4,000 additional backlog miles by 2018, totaling 9,047 miles of highway in crucial need of repair. If a standard \$1.28 million per mile price is factored in, the cost to just maintain the state highway system over the next 5 years = **\$11.6 billion.**

STATE BRIDGES

The state maintains jurisdiction over nearly 7,900 Illinois bridges. Bridges always receive priority treatment – and rightly so. But even with priority status, and no new money estimated, by the end of the most recent Highway Improvement Plan, only 90% of Illinois’ bridge inventory will be categorized in “acceptable condition.” That means 1 out of every 10 bridges will still seek major improvements.



The current backlog of bridges necessitating repair totals 781. Assuming a bridge has a 50-year lifespan will add an additional 774 bridges accruing repair over the course of the most recent Highway Improvement Plan. The result calculates to 1,555 bridges requiring replacement or renovation over the next 5 years. Factoring in an average of \$3.5 million per bridge repair, the cost just to maintain the current system of bridges over the next 5 years = \$5.4 billion.

CONGESTION AND EXPANSION

So far, this discussion has focused on the need to maintain the current system of Illinois highways. However, as the State of Illinois' population continues to grow, the demand for new highways to reduce congestion, improve capacity, modernize, and promote safety, as well as open up new commercial opportunities becomes unquenchable. Loss of business productivity due to congestion is estimated at \$8.9 billion in northeastern Illinois alone. To continually meet the demands of residential and commercial growth, Illinois must invest in new transportation arteries that will relieve the pressure on an already overburdened highway system.

- Congestion – In 2007, the American Economic Groups prepared a Capital Needs Analysis for the Illinois Road and Transportation Builders Association (IRTBA). Using that analysis as a base, plus inflating the costs by industry standards, subtracting the state's efforts since 2007, and adding 10% for new congestion growth, the current cost range for congestion relief = \$1.5 billion to \$4 billion.
- Highway Expansion – Using the same Capital Needs Analysis and increasing costs by the same construction inflation factor and subtracting the state's efforts since 2007, the current cost range for the state's highway expansion upgrades = \$5.3 billion to \$6 billion.
- Major Bridge Expansion – The most pressing need in major bridge expansion is the I-74 Quad Cities Bridge over the Mississippi River. Factoring in \$200 million per year for this project plus a handful of other spans puts the 5-year expenditures for major bridge expansion at: \$1 billion.

INTERSTATE MODERNIZATION

Much of Illinois' Interstate Highway System was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s and, therefore, lacks the modern standards of highway construction. To boost these aging roads up to modern standards is an important but costly proposition. A previous TFIC analysis assumed a cost of \$7.5 billion for 900 miles of highway in need of repair. However, at a presentation in Mt. Vernon, Illinois in August 2012, the Illinois Department of Transportation estimated the same number of repairable miles would cost \$15 billion. Assuming \$1 billion of this cost would be covered under the previous maintenance request, the expense of interstate modernization would cost between: \$6.5 and \$14 billion.

SAFETY

As with any major infrastructure system, many isolated repairs must be completed to maintain the safety of the system. Using the 2007 IRTBA Capital Needs Analysis and applying the industry inflation index, the current estimated cost for safety needs = **\$525 million**.

STATE HIGHWAY AND BRIDGES NEEDS SUMMARY

The following chart summarizes the current capital essential for the state's highways and bridges:

	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Highway maintenance	\$11.6 billion	\$11.6 billion
Bridge maintenance	\$5.4 billion	\$5.4 billion
Congestion	\$1.5 billion	\$4.0 billion
Highway expansion	\$5.3 billion	\$6.0 billion
Major bridges	\$1.0 billion	\$1.0 billion
Interstate modernization	\$6.5 billion	\$14 billion
Safety	\$0.5 billion	\$0.5 billion
Total	\$31.8 billion	\$42.5 billion

Just to meet the STATE highway and bridge needs would require \$31.8 to \$42.5 billion. Currently, with the passage of a supplemental appropriations bill (Public Act 98-0001), the amount dedicated to the multi-year program is slightly over \$5 billion which leaves a shortfall of: **\$26.8 to \$37.5 billion**.

Local Road Needs

Improving the state highway system to a level of acceptability is a difficult task; however, the demands to repair local roads run larger and are definitely more critical. As mentioned earlier, local jurisdictions oversee over 88% of the total number of public centerline (length of road) miles throughout Illinois. Although this percentage may only account for 36% of the vehicle miles traveled, the type of travel (especially in rural areas) and the inadequate and even primitive construction of many of these local roads present deeper and more costly problems.

Although *Illinois Jobs Now!* temporarily averted the monetary shortfall crisis at the state highway level, the program did little for local roads. With more than \$9.5 billion in non-Multi-Year Program (MYP) state funding approved in the 2009 capital bill, Illinois' local roads only received \$500 million. Couple this low funding with the additional *Illinois Jobs Now!* requirement that very heavy vehicles (weighing up to 80,000 pounds) are allowed to travel on local roads, and it is easy to argue that local jurisdictions were net losers.

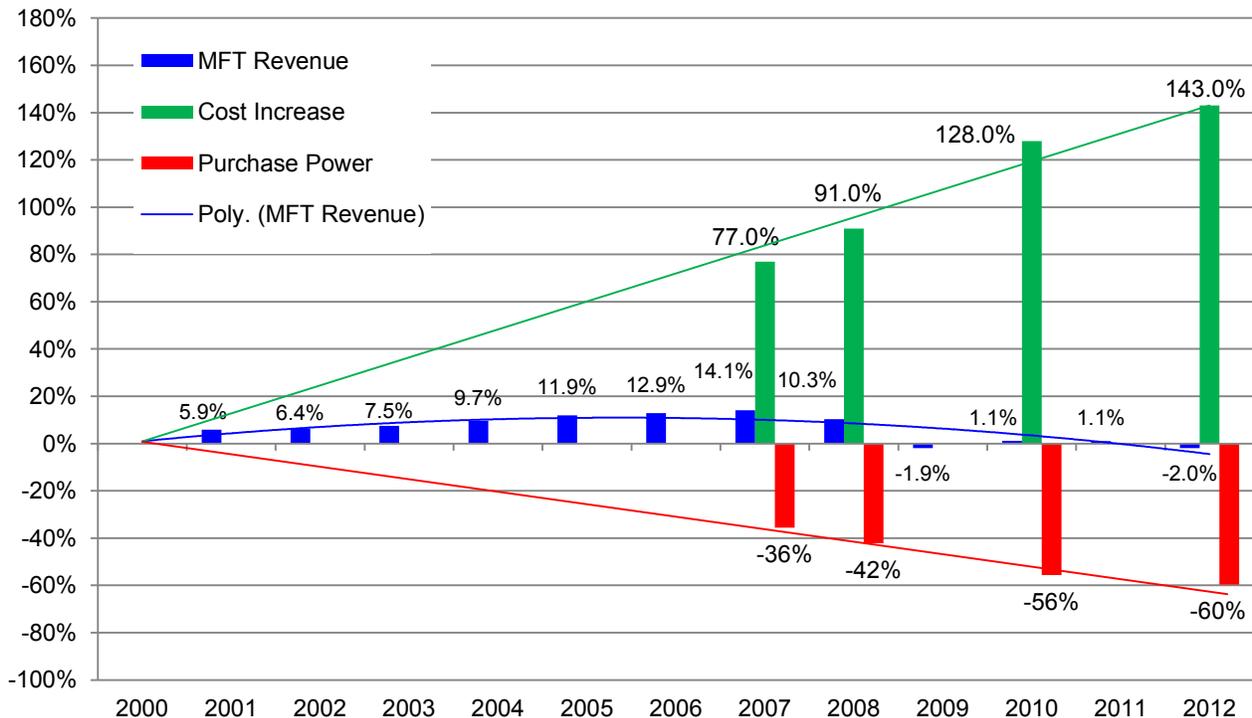
Assessing the true local road need and available resources is very difficult because multiple jurisdictions from municipalities to counties to townships to road districts exist. Each entity has varying miles of jurisdiction and even more diverse, yet highly limited, funding resources.

Another factor when assessing local road needs is that local governments must account for their administrative costs out of any available financial resource.

In 2006, an Illinois Association of County Engineers Revenue Committee study showed that the cost to strategically upgrade roughly 2/3 of county highways and township/road district roads to accommodate 73,280 pound vehicles would surpass existing available federal, state, and local revenues by \$15.4 billion – or \$770 million per year for 20 years. The estimate to accommodate 80,000 pound vehicles computed at \$43.8 billion beyond those existing revenues – or \$2.19 billion per year for 20 years

Another recent study conducted by this same association of professional engineers who serve the public determined that the local road motor fuel tax revenue stream formula was last increased in 2000 and in 2012 the MFT revenue was 2.0% below the 2000 level while during the same timeframe the costs for basic preservation of the existing local road system grew 2.4 times the 2000 level resulting in a 60% reduction in purchasing power for local roads from 2000 to 2012. This reduction in purchasing power is directly reflected in the increasing mileage of deferred or suspended maintenance and the resulting reduced levels of service on the local road system. The result is that in 2012 the average unit of local government could only afford to maintain 40% of the local road mileage it maintained in 2000. This study also confirmed a downward trend in the Motor Fuel Tax revenue stream funding to local roads which is by far the primary funding source and, in many localities, the sole funding source for the preservation and repair of local roads.

Local Roads



The same organization published the *County Highway & Township/Road District Road 2010 Revenue Shortfall*. Using data included in that report and adding an amount equal to the historic proportion for municipal roads, plus increasing for inflation, the 5-year need is \$20.8 billion. Assuming revenue derived from the motor fuel tax remains steady, local governments will receive \$2.8 billion over the same period. The result is a 5-year revenue shortfall of: **\$18 billion.**

Transit

REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY (RTA) REGION

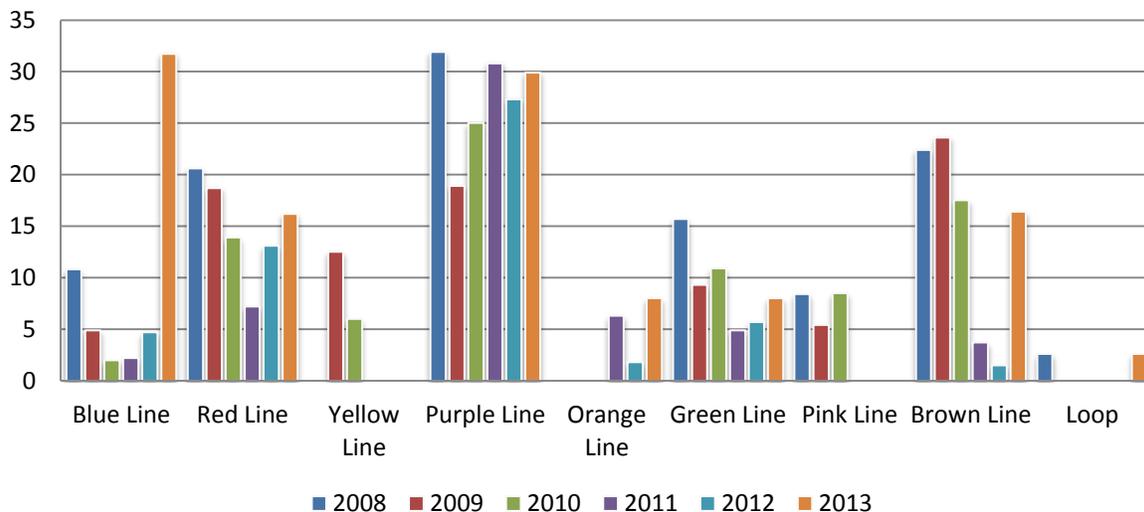
The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) serves the transit needs of northeastern Illinois and is comprised of the Chicago Transit Authority (commuter trains and buses), METRA (commuter trains), and PACE (suburban buses and regional paratransit). The RTA region ranks the 3rd largest transit system in the country with over 7,200 route miles throughout a 6-county region that serves over 8 million people. According to its website, the RTA provides nearly 2 million rides per day. The combined assets of these service boards average over \$42 billion and include more than 5,600 train cars and buses plus an additional 650 vanpool vehicles. Like every other major motor pool, these vehicles need constant maintenance, upkeep, and replacement.



Illinois' aging RTA transit system creates real performance and safety challenges. Slow zones are instituted in areas where train speeds must be restricted to maintain safe travel. Commonly, slow zones occur in sections of track that are beyond their service life and in need of repair or replacement.

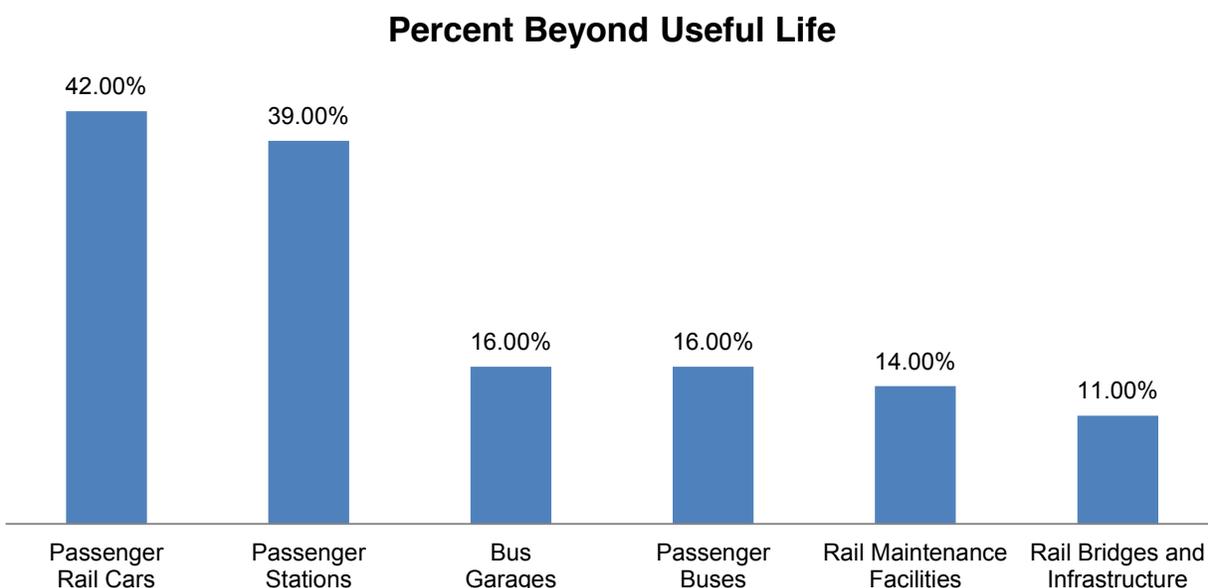
The following chart shows the percentage of each CTA line designated as a slow zone as of January of each year:

Slow Zones as a Percentage of CTA Line



In addition to these serious structural shortfalls, the CTA, METRA, and PACE face aging, rolling stock which, if not replaced, will continue to deteriorate, causing escalating maintenance and repair costs as well as increased service delays.

The RTA region is the nation's 2nd oldest major transit system based on the percentage of vehicles still in use beyond each vehicle's expected life. Only Boston's fleet is older. The RTA led a Capital Asset Condition Assessment that inventoried the entire region's aging transit assets. The following chart shows the percentage of each asset class that exceeds its useful life:



According to the “Repairing Chicagoland Transit Fact Sheet,” published by the RTA in the summer of 2012, the cost of repairing and maintaining the existing transit system is \$13.2 billion. But, as with highways, the region is demanding new lines and spurs in order to extend service to the broader population base. Using the RTA’s 2007 strategic plan and applying an Engineering News Record (ENR) cost index and industry standard inflation, the estimated cost for enhancements and expansions is \$6.8 billion. Combining repair costs with enhancements and expansions calculates to nearly \$20 billion needed for the RTA region capital improvements over the next 5 years. The current estimated funding is \$3.5 billion, for a total shortfall over the next 5 years of: **\$16.5 billion.**

DOWNSTATE TRANSIT

Outside of the RTA region, 9 additional urbanized mass transit districts and 3 municipal-run transit systems carry 28.3 million people per year. The Metro-East transit districts of St. Clair and Madison counties, along with the Bi-State Development Agency, serve an additional 9.5 million transit riders. Finally, 46 rural and small urban systems account for an additional 4 million passengers annually.

The Illinois Downstate Public Transportation Capital Needs Assessment for 2011 estimated the downstate capital requirement at \$674 million. The estimated funding over the next 5-years is \$151 million, leaving a 5-year funding shortfall of: **\$598 million.**

Rail

The Illinois rail network is the 2nd largest in the country, and Chicago is the single largest rail hub in the nation. Every day, 500 freight trains with 37,500 cars and 700 passenger and commuter lines pass through Chicago. Forty-one railroads provide service from Illinois to every part of the nation, and nearly 1/4 of the nation's rail-shipped goods and services move through the city.

Chicago is the Midwest hub for Amtrak and serves as the transfer point for 10 regional and transcontinental routes. In addition, Illinois provides supplemental funding for 28 daily stops between Chicago and St. Louis, Milwaukee, Quincy, and Carbondale. Amtrak services to Rockford and Moline will begin in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

In partnership with the Bloomington/Normal region, the Peoria region, which is the largest urbanized area in Illinois without a commitment for passenger rail service, recently completed a detailed feasibility study focused on commuter rail within Central Illinois. Ridership projections are encouraging, but additional funding is necessary to complete a detailed corridor analysis.

Chicago's status as the single largest rail hub in the country has a tremendously positive impact on the state's economy. Rail freight volume is expected to double by 2025, which will cause additional rail congestion and traffic-related delays in the Chicago area unless continued investments are made to reduce these inconveniences and potential impediments to continued economic growth.

CREATE

The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program, or CREATE, is designed to make travel more proficient by reducing motorists' delays, improving freight and passenger rail service, increasing safety, bettering air quality, and creating jobs. The program includes 70 rail and highway projects throughout northeastern Illinois. As of March 2012, 12 CREATE projects have been completed, 14 are under construction, 4 are in final design, and 15 are active in the environmental study process.

But CREATE is not cheap. The program has received \$326 million in federal funds, \$300 million from *Illinois Jobs Now!*, \$175 million from the railroad industry, \$33 million from the City of Chicago, and \$285 million in non-CREATE sources advanced from other federal, state, local, and private sources. The Illinois State Rail Plan established the needed additional resources over the next 5 years at \$2.8 billion. Assuming a 20% state match would require a 5-year funding commitment of: **\$480 million.**

HIGH SPEED AND OTHER INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

Illinois is committed to providing enhanced high speed rail between Chicago and St. Louis. The ultimate goal will allow train speeds up to 110 miles per hour, creating an attractive travel alternative while also realizing environmental and energy savings benefits. Various cost estimates, depending on the final alternative, fall between \$4.2 and \$5 billion. Assuming a minimum state match of 20%, the 5-year funding shortfall calculates to \$840 million – \$1 billion. Add an additional \$175 million for other passenger rail upgrades, and the total 5-year funding shortfall = \$1 – \$1.2 billion.

Defining the Need

The following chart summarizes the current range of transportation funding shortfall over the next 5 years:

	Low Range	High Range
State highways and bridges	\$26.8 billion	\$37.5 billion
Local roads	\$18.0 billion	\$18.0 billion
RTA region	\$16.5 billion	\$16.5 billion
Downstate transit	\$0.6 billion	\$0.6 billion
CREATE	\$0.5 billion	\$0.5 billion
Passenger rail	\$1.0 billion	\$1.2 billion
Airports*	\$0.1 billion	\$0.1 billion
Total	\$63.5 billion	\$74.4 billion

* Note: Airports outside of Chicago incur an estimated shortfall of about \$20 million per year.

The figures above illustrate the current and dire transportation situation. In order to address the monetary need, the current funding plan will require an additional \$12 to \$15 billion per year for the next 5 years.

Why Now

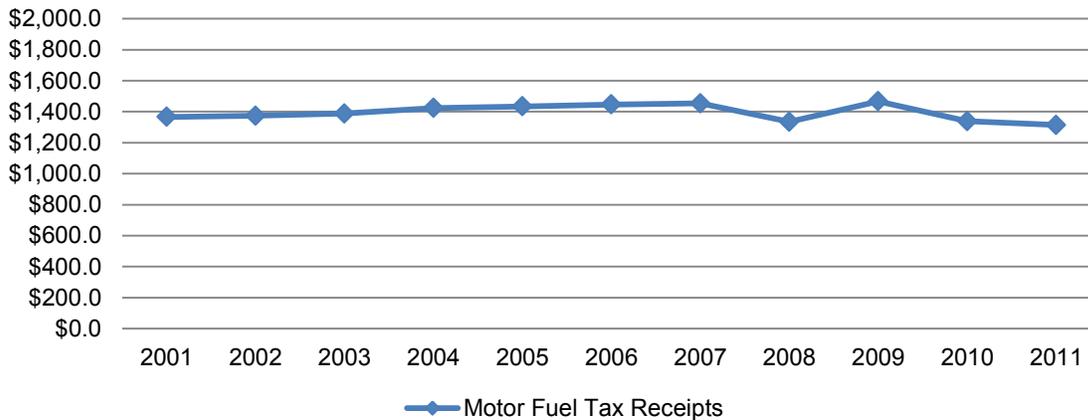
Obviously, meeting Illinois' total defined funding demand is not feasible. However, the state's deteriorating transportation predicament cannot be ignored or disregarded. It is imperative that Illinois address this shortfall in a sustainable manner. Additional resources must be committed and utilized in a well-designed plan. Restoring the ability to provide basic levels of maintenance across the entire public transportation network in order to prevent even further deterioration of the already declining transportation infrastructure must be an unequivocal first step. The most crucial projects must be identified and addressed. Priorities must be established, and the financial means to meet those priorities must be provided.

Prior to approval of the 2009 *Illinois Jobs Now!* capital program, 10 years lapsed without a significant capital construction program. This must not reoccur.

Although overly dramatic, the state of Illinois is on the edge of Armageddon. The state's transportation system is antiquated and worn out. It must be upgraded, enhanced, and replaced. Costs to build, repair, or restore old infrastructure increase every year. The longer Illinois procrastinates, the more expensive repairs get. Add this to the dormant revenue sources Illinois currently relies on to provide maintenance for transportation systems insufficiently funded to provide the quality and reliability the public expects and deserves. Without addressing Illinois' critical revenue needs, the state's failing transportation systems guarantee deterioration and failure.

Motor fuel tax, driver's license fees, and motor vehicle registrations are quantity-based revenues. Said differently, motor fuel tax is 19¢ per gallon whether gas is selling for \$2 per gallon or \$4 per gallon. Therefore, revenue is based on consumption. Higher gas prices, more fuel efficient vehicles, and vehicles utilizing alternative fuels lower motor fuel consumption and suppress the amount of revenue to be gained from traditional user-based fee sources.

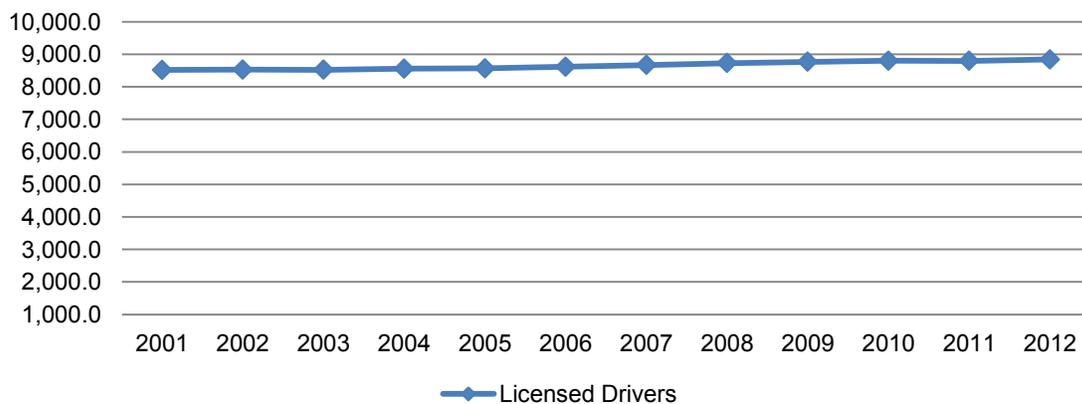
Motor Fuel Tax Receipts



Revenues derived through driver's licenses have not fared much better. Like motor fuel, these quantity-based revenues are determined by how many individuals are seeking licensure. Since 2001, the annual growth in the number of licensed drivers has averaged 0.4%.

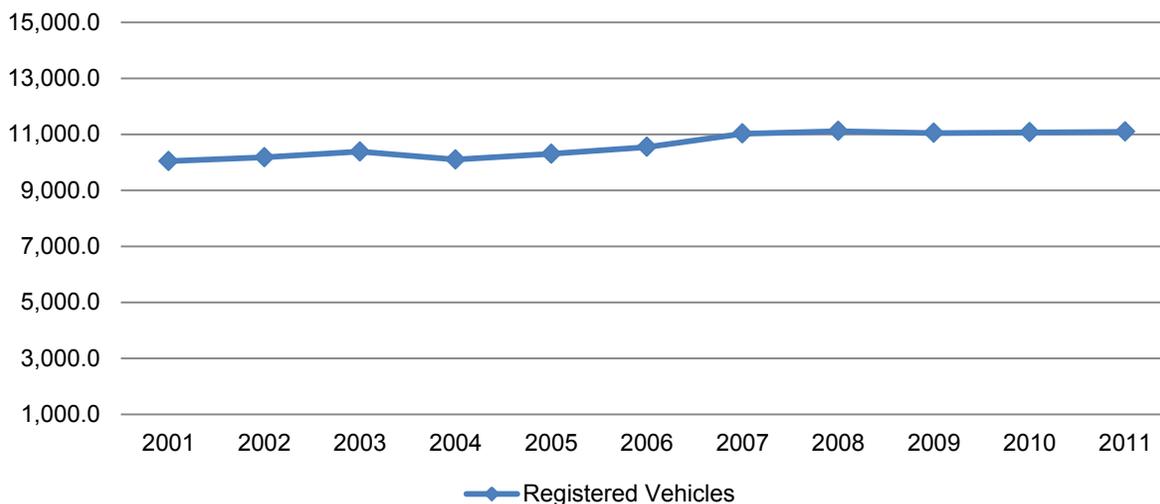
Licensed Drivers in Illinois

(in thousands)



Finally, vehicle registrations have also failed to keep pace with the rising costs of transportation maintenance and construction. These quantity-based revenues are determined by the number of vehicles that are registered in the state. Since 2001, the annual increase in the number of vehicle registrations has averaged 1.02%.

Registered Vehicles in Illinois
(in thousands)



Using the above time frame, revenues have remained flat and fairly constant since 2001. However, costs continue to escalate. What the state can purchase in 2011 is much less than what it could purchase in 2001.

It is also clear from above that Motor Fuel Tax Revenue is declining whereas the number of Licensed Drivers and Motor Vehicle Registrations are showing very limited growth. The reality is that the funding generated by each of these sources is diverging at a much more rapid pace.

PLAN DESIGN

As the state looks forward to finding additional resources, Illinois must recognize that not only is an influx of cash through a bonded capital program necessary, but the yearly maintenance program for roads, bridges, and transit needs to be enhanced and bolstered. Any increase in transportation funding should be dedicated solely for transportation purposes and protected from subsidizing other programs. Keep in mind that Illinois' transportation needs are not limited to state highways only. Nearly 9 out of 10 miles of public roads fall under local jurisdictions that face limited funding options.

A capital program should embrace the following principles:

- Dedicated, dynamic, and segregated revenues – while exploring funding options, Illinois must focus on revenues related to and dedicated to statewide transportation needs. These revenues should be dynamic enough to keep pace with the rising costs of construction

materials, labor, and services. And finally, these revenues should be deposited into special funds to prevent subsidizing other programs.

- Remember the locals – because Illinois’ transportation system falls under both state and local jurisdiction, local needs must not be forgotten. Traffic on public roads in Illinois pays for the use of non-toll public roads in the form of driver’s license fees, motor vehicle fees, and motor fuel taxes, as mentioned above, which the state collects as a continuing stream of revenue. 39.2% of non-toll traffic was carried by local roads in 2011; however, only 22.3% of that revenue stream collected by the state was returned to local roads. This inequity in the return of the revenue collected from traffic on local roads must be corrected.
- Policy-based not politically motivated – the overall transportation funding shortfall is so large that it cannot be properly addressed. Therefore, to maximize the most “bang for our buck,” Illinois must proceed in a well-planned, need-based manner that prioritizes and addresses the most pressing and critical transportation needs. These choices may not always be the most “sexy” or politically popular projects – but, hopefully, they will stave off Armageddon.
- The state’s objective – should be to establish a steady, reliable, predictable funding stream committed to maintaining the existing transportation networks in a state of good repair, while also providing adequate funding for high priority expansion and modernization projects.
- Return to annual programs – prior to Illinois FIRST, the state’s budget included an annual capital program that focused on small programs earmarked to help maintain the existing state infrastructure, make repairs, and provide necessary upkeep to avoid deterioration of the state’s assets, thereby reducing more costly overhauls and/or replacements. These programs did not require new revenues but, rather, used a small amount of existing revenue growth and refocused the debt service from retiring bonds. The state should return to this previous practice to avoid falling further and further behind on its deferred maintenance needs.
- Bolster the annual maintenance program – as revenues are generated to support additional capital, Illinois must dedicate a portion of these funds to an annual maintenance program. Ideally, the MYP should cover the majority of maintenance and upkeep on the existing system. Capital dollars should be used to complement the MYP providing additional resources for larger projects, new construction, lane additions, and congestion mitigation.

Conclusion

To say that Illinois’ transportation system is in crisis is an understatement. Maybe Armageddon is not coming tomorrow. But, with stagnant revenue and growing costs, the state’s road maintenance problems and needs will only continue to get worse at a compounding pace. This transportation emergency cannot be ignored. Action must be taken now to ensure Illinois will continue to maintain a healthy economy that guarantees neither people nor commerce will be impeded from moving throughout Illinois in an efficient and safe way.