TFIC meeting recap – 5-1-19:

After a two-week spring break, members of TFIC returned to Springfield this week ready to work toward passage of a capital bill. A larger crowd of transit and transportation advocates came together Wednesday morning to discuss transit needs with legislators.

The message was appropriately dire, but not hopeless.

Regional Transportation Authority

RTA Chairman Kirk Dillard set the tone:

·         $30 billion in repair needs within the RTA system now being unmet

·         Mass transit’s reach in Chicagoland is unparalleled: 35 percent of everyone with a job in Illinois took mass transit to work today, and 75 percent of the state’s GDP comes from the RTA geographic area. 70 percent of those working in the Chicago business district take transit to and from work. And when job creation was at its lowest after the national recession, half of the 11,000 jobs created in Illinois – and 85 percent of the construction jobs – were within a half-mile of transit access

Dillard noted that even with such a direct, powerful tie to the performance of the state and its mass transit system, a disconnect remains. Metra has the nation’s oldest system of rail cars, and Illinois is in the bottom 10 states for what we deliver for transportation. Neighbors Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan all recognize the need to invest in infrastructure. Illinois should follow suit and ensure a major federal transportation package can be fully matched here.

Other Chicago service boards

Pace, CTA and Metra carries millions of people to and from the city and suburbs every day. Their capital needs are in the billions.

They all stressed the work they’ve done to manage the unmanageable: extending the life of locomotives and buses instead of making purchases; maximizing fare increases for operations and capital needs; smartly using TIF districts in growth areas to draw in more supportive revenue. But the needs demand more.

Pace needs to invest in its growing Bus on Shoulders and paratransit programs. The CTA needs a plan for the Red Line to extend from 95th to 130th in the south suburbs. Metra’s $5 billion ask is primarily to ensure the system stays safe and trains can run on time.

Downstate transit

They don’t handle the traffic volumes of their city and suburban counterparts. But their needs are just as important for the millions of rides they provide every day.

Downstate transit systems – 14 urban and 42 rural – have a $300 million backlog, most of that for vehicles. Over the next 30 years, they estimate $3.1 billion in capital needs.

From Rockford to Rock Island to west-central Illinois, advocates talked about how thousands of people depend on their services every day to get to work, to school, to the doctor and grocery store. Many have no other alternative – if the transit system isn’t running, they aren’t going anywhere. All agreed it’s time for the state to step up and invest in transportation.