



Letter to the Editor

February 19, 2010

Dear Editor:

On behalf of the members of the Transportation for Illinois Coalition, we want to encourage the U.S. Senate to approve a new jobs bill.

This investment in Illinois' road and bridge system is an investment in Illinois' economic recovery. A second influx of money into transportation construction is needed.

Construction Industry Has Been Hard Hit: While the national unemployment rate hovers at 10%, unemployment in the construction trades exceeds 18%. In Illinois, the number of construction jobs fell from about 268,000 in Dec. 2007 to less than 210,000 in Dec. 2009, a drop of nearly 22%. Because both public and private sector construction has slumped, construction firms have been hit doubly and cannot shift from public to private work, or vice versa, to weather the recession. The jobs loss affects not just firms that do actual construction work, but materials suppliers, heavy equipment manufacturers, engineering firms, and myriad other businesses that are part of the broader construction industry. According to [cnmoney.com reported](http://cnmoney.com), 44% of transportation construction companies anticipate they will have to let go of employees this year. In a broader survey of the entire construction sector, the Association of General Contractors found that almost 90% of contractors do not expect to see their businesses grow this year and 27% expect that they will be forced to lay off workers.

Transportation Spending Creates Jobs: Just 6% of economic recovery funds went for transportation in 2009; yet transportation spending so far has accounted for more than 24% of the jobs created. As of Feb. 2, 2010, Illinois' highway stimulus projects had already created or sustained more than 1.6 million hours of direct on-project work, with payroll expenditures of more than \$60 million. Like the job statistics from the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, these numbers do not include the construction-related indirect jobs or the jobs induced as the payroll dollars are spent in the economy.

A local example of the benefit of federal stimulus brings this issue into focus. DeKalb County was able to build a small bridge with federal stimulus funding a year sooner than expected, improving access to and from a rural grain elevator and improving safety. This project provided workers with employment for an additional week.

Transportation Projects Are Ready To Proceed: According to an updated survey of the states released by AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) on Feb. 1, 2010, more than 9,800 transportation projects valued at \$79.41 billion are ready-to-go, that is, can move through the federal approval process within 120 days of enactment of a new jobs bill. The Illinois portion of the AASHTO survey included 310 highway projects, with an estimated cost of \$1.3 billion. IDOT has released a 26-page listing of proposed state highway projects that could move forward if H.R. 2487 were adopted. RTA estimates that there are more than \$500 million in ready-to-go transit projects.

Sincerely,

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