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News Release

For Immediate Release

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PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND BUSINESS LEADERS CALL FOR RENEWED COMMITMENT TO CAPITAL PROGRAM TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CREATE JOBS

[Peoria] – Business leaders and the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission joined local elected officials and others today to call on the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly to make comprehensive transportation funding a priority for the spring legislative session. Highlighting critical local transportation projects that are not likely to proceed without new state funding, they agreed with the Transportation for Illinois Coalition’s position that there is a need for a substantial program to upgrade Illinois transportation systems.

The Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with other area chambers has for over 10 years worked on and supported a list of regional road priorities (attached). Many regions with similar and smaller populations enjoy the benefits of significantly better highway service as compared to the Tri-County area. Addressing this deficiency is critical if we expect to successfully compete with other metropolitan areas in Illinois and the Midwest.

Illinois’ last comprehensive transportation funding program was Illinois FIRST, enacted in 1999. The remaining funds under Illinois FIRST were disbursed three years ago. Since 2003, state capital spending for highways and transit has been slashed by more than 60 percent (\$1.2 billion a year), and the number of miles of state highways repaired and improved each year has dropped from about 1,200 in 2003 to a proposed 360 for 2007.

“A healthy economy in Illinois is what provides the resources for state and local government to meet all of their other responsibilities and goals. Over the past several years we have not been investing adequately in the infrastructure upon which our economy depends. We need to take responsible steps soon to avoid severe economic consequences in the near future. We are willing to work with the leaders in state government to craft a program that will keep our state strong and our roads safe.” says Charles Purcell of G & D Integrated, a local logistics firm.

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The Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce and the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission both strongly believe that it is time for a capital program in Illinois. It must be aggressive and forward looking, comprehensive and addressing needs throughout the state and driven by local interests and needs. Additionally, the capital program must have a defined and dedicated funding source, most likely user fees. It is also critical that the funding source have a guarantee from the Governor and the General Assembly that it not be diverted to other purposes as has happened in recent years.

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