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Contact: Michelle Valmond

Jasculca/Terman and Associates for Transportation for Illinois Coalition

312-573-5491 office, 312-933-7594 cell

**HUNDREDS RALLY AT STATE CAPITOL FOR RENEWED STATE
COMMITMENT TO TRANSPORTATION TO CREATE JOBS,
PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

*Business and labor leaders join together in support of new
transportation funding package*

SPRINGFIELD – Surrounded by hundreds of supporters and heavy construction equipment left idle for lack of projects, Illinois' top business and labor leaders joined forces at a rally at the Statehouse today to warn of the dire consequences of continuing to defer needed investments in our state's transportation infrastructure. They called on legislators and the Governor to make comprehensive funding for Illinois transportation a priority this year.

Participants said the state's economy cannot afford to wait another year as our transportation systems continue to deteriorate. They described massive infrastructure needs in all corners of the state—thousands of highways, roads and bridges in disrepair, bottlenecked freight lines in northeastern Illinois, underfunded and aging transit systems, and badly congested urban and suburban roads, all suffering from declining investment in recent years.

The rally was organized by the Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC), a diverse group of statewide and regional business, labor, and governmental and planning organizations that have joined together to support a strong transportation alliance for Illinois.

“Our transportation systems are Illinois' most prized economic development asset and are absolutely critical to attracting new companies, growing existing businesses and promoting ongoing economic growth in our state,” said Doug Whitley, president of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce and TFIC co-chair. “We are reaching a tipping point—if we don't act this spring, the past few years of declining investment will put out of reach the possibility of adequately maintaining and enhancing our highway, transit, and rail networks.”

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In February, TFIC issued a report calculating Illinois' underinvestment in transportation at \$25 billion based on studies commissioned and needs identified by government and industry groups. Based on this assessment, TFIC is recommending that the General Assembly increase annual program investments by \$5 billion a year for the next five years.

"We have a transportation-based economy in Illinois. It is essential that we protect and promote our economy for the benefit of working people," said Michael T. Carrigan, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO and TFIC co-chair.

"We have to keep fighting for jobs, and 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 cut 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.

"We are flirting with disaster if we continue underfunding transportation," said Whitley. "Failure to properly plan for the future and invest in our infrastructure will damage one of our state's top economic engines, undermining our ability to pay for other vital government programs."

"This rally sends a strong message about the need to improve and support transportation this year," said Jim Reilly, chair of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). "The RTA hopes the Governor and General Assembly will also rally to secure needed funding to maintain, enhance and expand northeastern Illinois' transit system."

TFIC has pledged to work with the General Assembly to come up with a plan to fund its comprehensive economic growth package, which would supplement federal dollars allocated for many of these programs. Among options on the table, it said, are reducing diversions of dollars from the Road Fund into other areas of spending, state and local bond issues and as-yet unspecified increased state or local revenue sources that will be determined during the legislative process.

TFIC is a diverse group of statewide and regional business, labor, industry, not-for-profit and governmental organizations that have joined together in a united and focused effort to support a strong transportation alliance for Illinois. The Coalition takes a comprehensive approach and seeks to speak with one voice for all of Illinois when it comes to transportation funding needs at the federal and state level. This comprehensive approach involves all modes of transportation, including rail, air, water, highways and mass transit. For more information about TFIC, visit www.TFICIllinois.org.