



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**PUBLIC OFFICIALS, BUSINESS AND LABOR LEADERS CALL
FOR RENEWED STATE COMMITMENT TO TRANSPORTATION
TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CREATE JOBS**

The Champaign County Chamber of Commerce, East Central Illinois Building & Construction Trades Council endorse Transportation for Illinois Coalition's statewide campaign for new transportation funding package

CHAMPAIGN – Business and labor leaders joined elected officials, including **Laura Weis of the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce, Dave Johnston, Administrator of the Village of Rantoul and Dan McCall, President of the East Central Building and Construction Trades** 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 cannot proceed without new state funding, they endorsed Transportation for Illinois Coalition's call for \$5 billion a year in new state funding over the next five years.

“We have a number of critical transportation needs in Champaign County, including Olympian Drive from Market Street to U.S. Route 45 and Curtis Road from Wynstone Drive to First Street. These projects would promote business and job growth for our region, but unless the legislature comes up with new funding, we cannot make these vital investments in our local economy,” said David Johnston as Previous Past Chair of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission and Village Administrator for the Village of Rantoul.

In February, the Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC) issued a report identifying \$25 billion in transportation needs across the state and calling on the General Assembly to pass a new transportation-funding package. TFIC is 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.

The most critical project is a new segment of Olympian Drive, a principal east west arterial across the northern periphery of Champaign-Urbana. The new road would begin west of Apollo Drive near Market Street in Champaign and continue east to a new intersection with U.S. Route 45 in Urbana. The total project cost is estimated to be \$41 million.

Another important investment is the completion of Curtis Road from Wynstone Drive to First Street. This project is regionally significant considering the connection that this roadway will have with the new planned Interstate 57 interchange. This roadway will serve as a connector between the University of Illinois and cities/towns located in downstate Illinois. It will also act as a main corridor serving the southwest area of Champaign and north Savoy.

These projects are two of over 30 projects in the 2007 Agenda of Champaign County Community Projects. The Agenda highlights community projects that meet the goals specified for the region in the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's comprehensive strategy, Opportunity Returns. More than one half of the projects in the Agenda are related to transportation including intersection and road improvements. Other projects include school expansions and trails to link communities in the county.

"Efficient roads, highways, bridges and rail crossings are the backbone of our regional economy," said Johnston. "Our elected officials in Springfield must recognize that our community's future, and our state's future depend on this infrastructure and do everything they can to protect and promote these vital assets."

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.

"If we don't act this spring, the past few years of declining investment in our transportation infrastructure will put out of reach the possibility of adequately maintaining and enhancing our highway, transit, and rail networks," said Illinois Chamber of Commerce President Doug Whitley, TFIC co-chair.

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.

"We have a transportation based economy in Illinois. It is essential that we protect and promote our economy for the benefit working people," said Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael T. Carrigan, TFIC co-chair. "We have to keep fighting for good-paying jobs, and the tax base that supports everything that government does."

For more information about TFIC and a list of members, visit www.tficillinois.org.

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