TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS, AND TRANSIT

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ON

MAINTAINING OUR NATION'S HIGHWAY AND TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE

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The RTA is the financial oversight and regional planning body for the three public transit operations in northeastern Illinois: The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit provider. For more information, visit *www.rtachicago.org* and *www.movingbeyondcongestion.org*.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am, Steve Schlickman, Executive Director of the Regional Transportation Authority of Northeastern Illinois, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide testimony. As the Executive Director of the Regional Transportation Authority in Chicago, the maintenance needs of our capital infrastructure is one of my main worries. Thus I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee today.

The RTA was established in 1974 by referendum in the six-county northeastern Illinois region. The Authority provides funding, planning and fiscal oversight for regional bus and rail operations. The RTA system is comprised of three operating agencies – the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra Commuter Rail (Metra), and Pace Suburban Bus (Pace) – and includes over 3800 buses and vans and 2300 train cars serving Chicago and hundreds of suburbs spread across a six-county, 3,700 square mile region. The CTA provides bus and rapid transit rail service in the City of Chicago and adjacent suburbs; Metra provides commuter rail service throughout the region; and Pace provides bus service in the suburbs, as well as paratransit services for the entire region.

The RTA network is the second largest public transportation system in North America and provides over two million rides each weekday. Earlier this year, we achieved a significant victory in the Illinois legislature that secured substantial new, dedicated funds to pay for transit operations in the Chicago region. However, as significant as the Illinois General Assembly's action was, it was only a partial victory. We still must address billions of dollars in unfunded capital needs.

I will get to the specific needs of the Chicago region in more detail shortly. However, I first want to make the case for why Congress should make the hard choices necessary to provide the increase in capital funding needed to keep our nation's metropolitan transit systems operating safely and reliably.

The 100 largest metropolitan areas are economic powerhouses, covering just 12 percent of land area, but generating 75 percent of gross domestic product.[i] Their continued success and economic growth is essential to our nation's global competitiveness. Unfortunately, worsening congestion threatens the economic efficiency and livability of these regions. The Texas Transportation Institute estimates that areas over one million people have the worst congestion, averaging 44 hours of delay per person per year. This translates into billions of dollars a year in lost productivity.

However, the Texas Transportation Institute study also indicated that transit was part of the solution to metropolitan traffic congestion. The study estimated that existing mass transit service in metropolitan areas with over three million people saved commuters 430 million hours of traffic delays.

There is no question that reliable transit service is essential to addressing congestion in large metropolitan regions, especially given the cost and difficulty of building new roads in urban environments. This means ensuring that the transit service is safe and reliable and includes modern equipment in order to attract riders. It also means increasing the core capacity of systems so that more people can use transit. In many cities, including Chicago, not only is more capital funding needed to maintain existing service so that it is safe and reliable, but significant additional investment is necessary to increase the capacity of the existing system to meet growing demand.

Skyrocketing gas prices have led a growing number of people in metropolitan regions to try mass transit and many systems are bursting at the seams due to this new demand. The availability of transit service is critical if we are to give commuters an alternative to growing road congestion and rising gas prices. For cities like Chicago to continue to provide top level service and to grow to meet the increased demand that transit systems all across the nation are experiencing, the federal government is going to have to step up and provide additional capital funds. The more people we can get out of their cars and using transit, the more we can reduce the demand for oil, ease congestion, and address climate change.

Transit use reduces travel in the U.S. by 102 billion vehicle miles each year. This directly results in petroleum savings of 1.4 billion gallons a year. When accounting for the effect of public transportation on land use patterns and the carryover effect on travel patterns from effective land use, transit saves the equivalent of 4.2 billion gallons of gasoline each year. This reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 37 million metric tons.[ii] Climate change is a significant issue facing the nation, and increased use of mass transit must be part of the solution.

We believe that transit, particularly large urban systems, can play a significant role in addressing these national issues. If our goal is to reduce road congestion, minimize carbon emissions, and increase energy security transit can provide an immediate impact on all of these national issues. However, we must find ways to address the capital needs of large metropolitan transit systems if they are to be part of the solution. We simply cannot increase transit ridership sufficiently to meet these goals without investing the money necessary to modernize our transit infrastructure so transit providers can continue to attract riders with reliable and comfortable service.

Last year, we began working with a loose coalition of transit agencies representing eleven large metropolitan areas, many of which are also old rail cities. The group, which we have named the Metropolitan Rail Discussion Group, includes transit representatives from New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Washington D.C have come together to begin developing principles for the authorization of the federal surface transportation program, which expires in 2009.

The metropolitan areas represented in this coalition provide two-thirds of transit trips nationally and yet receive less than half of the federal transit funding nationally. Our core principle is that the federal transit program should be allocated according to need in order to achieve the maximum impact on issues of national importance. We have just begun the process of conducting a transit capital assessment in order to better quantify the needs of our discussion group members and other large urban transit systems. The results from this assessment were not ready in time for this hearing and will not be ready until later this year. However, we did provide congressional staff a briefing on our group's general infrastructure needs as reflected in the attached PowerPoint presentation. Also at the end of the testimony we provide a brief summary of the infrastructure needs of a few of our peer systems around the country. We will submit the full capital assessment report from our coalition for the record once it is completed.

Today I would like to provide the Committee with a summary of the results from a strategic plan the RTA conducted in 2006, which included an in-depth study of our capital needs. We believe that our needs are very similar to those of other large urban transit systems. We believe the Chicago metropolitan system exemplifies the needs of other large urban transit systems like the northeastern Illinois region's transit system. But before providing further details about the

region's transit capital maintenance needs, I would like to provide the Committee with a brief overview of the RTA.

The Chicago metropolitan region has grown by nearly 1.5 million residents to more than 8.2 million people over the last two decades. This growth has been particularly significant in the suburbs, where some counties have seen a near doubling of its population over the 20-year time span. These factors have only exacerbated an already worsening congestion problem. In fact, by some measures, the Chicago region has the 2nd worse congestion in the country. As the region's population has continued to grow, so has the transit system's ridership. However, the region's public transportation system has struggled to keep up with the demands of this ridership increase.

Some parts of the system are newer and work very well, while other parts are more than a century old and are in need of a major overhaul. For safety reasons, we have slow zones on several city and suburban train lines throughout the system causing delays for everyday commuters. Some of the busiest train lines are so crowed during rush hour that people cannot board. Many of our buses, trains and passenger vans are well past their useful life, leading to more frequent breakdowns and even more delays.

It was in this context that the RTA and the operating agencies conducted a comprehensive system-wide strategic planning initiative to guide the region as it attempted to answer the critical questions about the condition and adequacy of the system and the resources required to improve and maintain this $27 billion asset.

In addition to outlining needed management reforms and coordination improvements, the plan estimated a capital investment need of $57 billion (in 2006 dollars) over the next 30 years. Approximately $19 billion in federal capital funding is anticipated to be available during that time, which leaves an unfunded capital investment need of $38 billion. The plan also identified a 5-year capital need of $16.1 billion to maintain, enhance and expand the region's transit system. Of this 5-year figure, $4.7 billion would be committed to expanding the system, while $1.1 billion would go towards system enhancements to begin to sustain and grow system into one that is of a world-class scale.

However, recognizing the fact that the system will never realize this future vision unless we "take care of what we already have," $10.3 billion is dedicated to maintaining the system. These maintenance projects would be focused on protecting the existing regional transit services and keeping the system operating in good repair, so that current service levels are maintained, buses and trains run on time and do not break down, and stations and facilities are well-maintained and safe, including the costs or replacing vehicles and other parts of the system that wear out over time. The breakdown of these maintenance requirements is as follows:

- **Rolling Stock**
  Like many other systems across the country, there is an ongoing need to replace and rehabilitate vehicles in order to provide reliable and safe service. For the CTA, more than 650 buses older than 12 years need to be replaced, while more than 900 railcars, with need to be replaced in the next 5 years. Pace needs to replace the 119 buses that are beyond their expected 12-year life spans, while Metra needs to replace its 35-year old "Highliner" electric rail cars and continue its rehabilitation programs for other locomotives and cars. Over the next 5 years, the total capital needed in the region to maintain the rolling stock is $2.9 billion.

- **Track and Structure**
  The rail system in the RTA region includes nearly 1,500 miles of track and numerous structures, such as bridges, elevated structures, viaducts, and retaining walls. Much of the system was built around the turn of the 20th Century. CTA track and structure needs include accelerated track and tie replacements to address slow zones; structural rehabilitation of the North Mainline; upgrade of the subway ventilation and fan systems; and rehabilitation of bridges, viaducts and retaining walls. Metra has 1,200 miles of track, 800 bridges, and hundreds of signals and switches. Metra's capital track and structure needs include track infrastructure improvements, new pedestrian bridges and bridge rehabilitation, and new grade separations and grade crossing renewals. Over the next 5 years, the total capital needed in the region to maintain the track structure of the system is $2.1 billion.

- **Signals, Electrical, and Communications**
  The RTA system encompasses an extensive set of signal, electrical, and communications infrastructure, including signals, automatic block signals, track switches, signal relays, interlockers, grade crossing and pedestrian crossing signals, some dating back to the 1950s. Over the next 5 years, the total capital needed in the region to maintain the electrical signal and communications system is $1.4 billion.

- **Support Facilities & Equipment**
  Some of the RTA system support facilities were built around the turn of the 20th Century. For example, the CTA Archer and 77th Street bus garages were adapted from streetcar barns built around 1908, The Weldon Facility at 14th Street on the Metra Electric District, first opened in the 1920s. Pace's capital needs for support facilities & equipment include the replacement of system-wide fare collection equipment, improvements to garages, replacement of office and computer equipment and maintenance/support equipment. Over the next 5 years, the total capital needed in the region to maintain the support facilities and equipment is $1.8 billion.

- **Passenger Facilities**
  The RTA system has more than 370 rail stations and thousands of bus stops. The CTA system includes144 rail stations, several off-street bus facilities, and bus stops on more than 150 bus routes. The system's passenger facility needs include the ongoing reconstruction of major stations, ADA station work, station upgrades and station parking expansion and rehabilitation. Over the next 5 years, the total capital needed in the region for passenger facilities is $1.1 billion.

Another issue of concern for large urban transit systems has been issues of core capacity that have constrained our ability to deal with increased demand and ridership. In a general sense, core capacity deals with those elements which constrain a system's ability to increase ridership. The question is how to do you accommodate new additional riders?

For example, in Chicago, the CTA had a major problem with overcrowding on its Brown Line service. In 2006, the CTA began a $530 million rehabilitation and capacity expansion program for the Brown Line utilizating federal New Starts funding. When completed, the project will extend station platform lengths to support 8-car trains and make all of the stations along the line wheelchair accessible. New Starts-funded capacity expansion project should not be unique to Chicago. Similar needs are found throughout the largest transit rail systems. In many cases the

mobility benefits sought by the New Start Program can be most cheaply and effectively achieved through capacity improvements for these systems, given that they serve markets that have the greatest demand for transit.

Although the Discussion Group plans to complete its needs assessment within the next few months, below are a few brief summaries detailing the overall maintenance needs of a few of our member systems.

Metropolitan Transit Authority – New York

As the largest regional transit provider in the Western Hemisphere, the MTA's network of commuter railroads, subways and buses handles 8 million trips each weekday, while its 7 bridges and two tunnels serve approximately 900,000 vehicles each day. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, over 5,800 buses navigate the city streets and our 8,500 rail cars travel over 2,000 miles of track and service over 700 stations. Delivering reliable service depends on constant investment in the core system to ensure that every component of that system works. These visible components of service are supported behind the scenes and beneath the streets by the tens of thousands of components that make up the "invisible" infrastructure. This infrastructure, both visible and invisible, must work well in order for customers to experience good service. A failure in any one of these tens of thousands of assets can mean delays for hundreds of thousands of customers. The 2008-2013 Capital Program provides a range of investments to address all components of the basic, core infrastructure. Investments of $7.7 billion in the visible infrastructure include $3.2 billion in station rehabilitations and component replacement to improve the customer environment, and $4.5 billion for ongoing fleet replacement and expansion, which will continue to provide transit and railroad customers with both enhanced comfort and a ride that is less prone to breakdown.

The MTA's continuing capital investments of $11.5 billion in the invisible infrastructure will ensure even further improvements in reliability. The program invests in: replacing track to allow the trains to operate smoothly and at maximum speeds; rehabilitating pump rooms to remove water from the system and new investments to prevent the type of flooding that crippled the system last year; replacing fan plants to maximize response to smoke conditions; modernizing signals; and overhauling the extensive power system to ensure uninterrupted electricity to move trains and operate these support systems. Investments to expand or reconfigure maintenance shops, rail yards and bus depots accommodate the growing, more diverse fleets.

Washington Metro Area Transit Authority – Washington DC

In March 2008, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) proposed a $489 million plan to address urgent critical repairs to maintain a safe and reliable rail, bus and paratransit system. WMATA plans to reprioritize capital projects and shift funds to more pressing projects over the next two years, including making immediate repairs to power systems, water-damaged cables, and customer facilities (e.g., replacing deteriorating ceiling tiles and platforms), as well as replacing wooden rail ties and worn-out track fasteners to help prevent fires and improve reliability.

In addition to the rail reliability improvements, monies also would be spent on safety enhancements, bus maintenance facility rehabilitation, MetroAccess vehicles and information technology equipment. More than $12 million would be spent to comply with recommendations from safety oversight agencies for emergency door releases on the outside of railcars and equipment to automatically grease rail car wheels to prevent derailments.

To address urgent critical repairs, WMATA is planning to spend $157 million in 2009 and 2010 using reprioritized funding from other on-going rehabilitation projects, as well as some potential borrowing. Under the proposal, WMATA would still need $332 million beyond 2010 to pay for additional urgent capital needs, such as continued work on track and power upgrades needed for rail reliability, rehabilitating vaulted ceilings in stations and repaving several parking lots. Those additional needs would be included in the next ten-year capital improvement plan (CIP).

WMATA is currently developing a ten-year CIP to address *all* of the transit system's capital needs between 2011 and 2020. These capital needs will include improvements to keep the system in a state of good repair, such as rail and bus fleet replacement and improvements to maintenance facilities, systems, elevators and escalators, parking lots, tracks, stations, tunnels and bridges. This capital plan will also include capacity enhancements, particularly rail and bus fleet expansion, needed to keep up with expected ridership growth over that period.

WMATA's last ten-year CIP developed in 2002, projected state-of-good repair and capacity enhancement capital needs at roughly $6 billion. Rapid inflation in construction and equipment costs since 2002 will drive up the comparable costs for the next ten years. In addition, the 30-year-old Metrorail system is requiring many lifecycle replacement costs for the first time, including the replacement of nearly one-third of the rail car fleet.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority – Boston, Massachusetts

The MBTA owns and operates one of the oldest and most extensive mass transit systems in the country. The MBTA has the fifth highest transit ridership in the country and transit usage is three times the national average as a percentage of total travel. The MBTA provides public transportation services to a service district of 175 cities and towns across Eastern Massachusetts encompassing almost 4.7 million people over an area of 3,200 square miles. The Authority moves 1.1 million passengers every day on a system of bus routes, rapid transit lines, commuter rail lines, ferry routes, trackless trolley lines, paratransit and a bus rapid transit system.

The MBTA's transit system comprises over 125 transit stations that provide over 650,000 trips each weekday, a bus/trackless trolley system consisting of over 170 routes that generate over 375,000 trips each weekday, and a commuter rail system consisting of 702 miles and 126 stations that produce over 38 million annual unlinked trips.

The MBTA owns and operates an enormous amount of physical infrastructure, including 2,500 vehicles, 275 stations, 885 miles of track, approximately 500 bridges, 20 miles of tunnels, and many more components of maintenance facilities, garages, power substations, signal equipment and other infrastructure. In 2006, the estimated net worth of MBTA infrastructure (excluding real estate) was approximately $12 billion.

The MBTA's FY09-13 Capital Investment Program (the "CIP") authorizes $3.75 billion in capital spending to reinvest in its transportation infrastructure and to build expansion projects. Of this $3.75 billion, $880 million represents funding from non-MBTA sources. Of the 2.87B in MBTA investment, 94% or $2.7B represents reinvestment in existing infrastructure.

The larger principles guiding the programming of funds are based on the MBTA's enabling legislation and the "State of Good Repair" standards. Projects in the CIP were and are selected through an ongoing prioritization process that strives to balance capital needs across the entire range of MBTA transit services in four major programmatic areas: 1) reinvestment in the existing infrastructure, 2) accessibility improvements, 3) enhancement to existing services and

4) system expansion efforts. Given the Authority's financial limitations, its vast array of infrastructure, and the need for prudent expansion, the number of capital needs identified each year usually exceeds the MBTA's capacity to provide capital funds.

However, one of the highest priorities of the CIP for the MBTA is the pursuit of a state of good repair (as is reflected by the fact that 94% of the CIP represents reinvestment in existing infrastructure), and to assist with its annual investment allocations, the MBTA utilizes a State of Good Repair database, which helps guide capital decisions, particularly with respect to funding the MBTA's backlog of state of good repair projects.

As detailed in its most recent State of Good Repair Report, the MBTA needs to spend approximately $470 million per year to maintain the current state of good repair backlog, which is $2.7 billion. The state of good repair "backlog" is defined as the total cost to renew or replace all assets that are currently beyond their useful life. Even with unlimited funds, it would take nearly 7 years to complete these backlogged projects, during which time an additional $2.1 billion in needs would be generated. In brief, stating this another way, undertaking enough projects to bring the MBTA to an ideal state of good repair would require a massive investment of around $4.8 billion over 7 years.

Conclusion

With the impending authorization of the federal surface transportation program, we have an ideal opportunity to address the challenges that increasing congestion and climate change present to our nation's economic growth and competitiveness if we are willing to make the financial commitment necessary to rebuild and enhance our existing transit assets. We hope that the next transit bill will increase transit capital funding enough to allow the large older transit systems to address these significant capital needs so that we can continue to make transit an increasingly attractive transportation alternative. At its core, federal funding for transit must increase, and the share of that funding going to transit systems in major metropolitan areas must increase. This will allow large urban transit systems to eliminating our backlog of necessary capital investments in order to bring the infrastructure of the older rail systems to a state of good repair, while addressing our core capacity needs. While we believe that the needs of the largest and oldest systems are especially acute, we recognize that newer systems and smaller systems also have important funding needs and the only way to address this problem is to significantly increase the funding for transit programs as part of the next transportation bill.

Mr. Chairman, again thank you and the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify. I appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in this area and would be pleased to respond to questions at this time.

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[i] "Metro Nation." Metropolitan Policy Center at Brookings. December 2007

[ii] "The Broader Connection between Public Transportation, Energy Conservation and Greenhouse Gas Reduction." February 2008 by ICF International