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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
"Infrastructure Investment:
Ensuring an Effective Economic Recovery Package"

January 22, 2009

Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica and the rest of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and talk about the needs of Chicago's transit system and the benefits that may result from an economic recovery bill.

My name is Carole Brown and I am the Chairman of the Board of the Chicago Transit Authority. The CTA is the second largest transit agency in the country, as we carry over 1.6 million rides per weekday on our 242 miles of track and 154 bus routes throughout Chicago and Cook County. We are also the primary transit agency in the northeastern Illinois, as the CTA carries 80 percent of all of the transit rides in the Chicago region. Many of you might know the CTA as the agency that operates the "L", the elevated train system that has become an iconic symbol of Chicago.

However, that iconic symbol is aging and in poor health, as is our bus fleet and our subway system. Our oldest elevated train – the north loop branch – was built in 1897. Our oldest subway, the State Street Red Line, was built during World War II. Our system has been built and rebuilt many times over, and for the most part, constructed primarily with local funds.

As you can see from this pie chart (attachment 1), the CTA has a $6.8 billion, five-year unfunded state of good repair need. That doesn't even include our fully funded five year, $3 billion capital plan, and nor does it include expansion projects that total over $4 billion. $6.8 billion is the shortfall that we need to meet in order to fully maintain our system.

The largest maintenance need - $4 billion – is in the category of funding that Congress often calls "Rail Mod". The $4 billion includes between $500 million and $1 billion each for signals, structure, track, and stations. These pictures (attachment 2 and 3) of rail ties and rail structure are unfortunately common throughout our system.

We also need $1.2 billion to repair and replace our rail fleet that travels 225,000 miles per day. 28 percent of our fleet is over 32 years old. What makes this notable is the FTA standard for useful life is 25 years. Our rail fleet's average age is 24 years.

We are thankful for all of the federal rail modernization and other formula funds we receive. In the past two years the CTA has borrowed against future federal funds in order to reduce our slow zones from 30 percent of the rail system to just 6 percent. And it is a good thing we did so at that time, because while we were finishing repair work in 2008 CTA ridership increased 5 percent due to a sudden spike in gas prices. At the same time, as was seen throughout the rest of the country, vehicle miles traveled on the region's roads declined. The good news is that even after gas prices were cut in half this past fall, those people that had switched from driving to transit continued to ride the trains and buses rather than return to driving. If we hadn't fixed the slow zones when we did, then

in all probability those people new to transit would have become fed up with the slow, inefficient, and unreliable train service and quickly returned to commuting in their cars.

My point in this narrative is to show how important it is to maintain a transit system – not just for our transit system, but for the whole region and country, as a healthy transit system also helps alleviate congestion on a region's roads. But if we don't receive an infusion of funds soon to build upon our repair work, then our work will be for naught, the slow zones will return, and those people who did give transit a try will return to their cars.

A significant portion of our fleet of 2,200 buses, which carry a million rides per weekday, is well past its intended life. 15 percent of our bus fleet is more than 12 years old, which happens to be the FTA standard for useful life. And keep in mind that while I am stating FTA standards for useful life for rail cars and buses, our rail cars and buses travel many more miles than in a typical transit system. As you can see from this picture (attachment 4), our three hundred-plus 1995 series buses average over 450,000 miles. These buses have traveled the distance from the earth to the moon – AND back.

Our transit needs are dire in Chicago, and as long as federal stimulus money flows quickly and directly to the CTA rather than being held up at the state or regional level, we could obligate more than $500 million in 90 days to fix slow zones on our rail system and buy rail cars and buses. This would create over 1,000 high paying construction jobs in Chicago, and countless other jobs in places such as St. Cloud, Minnesota, where New Flyer would construct buses for the CTA system. Unfortunately, New Flyer, who I am told will have a representative appear before this committee later today, has informed the CTA that if they do not receive orders from transit agencies soon – the CTA has an option for over 50 buses with New Flyer - they will be forced to close their St. Cloud plant.

Clearly, the economic recovery package couldn't come at a better time – both for riders in big cities such as Chicago and for factory workers in small towns such as St. Cloud. But this isn't just a short-term jobs bill. It is an investment. Not just in our transit system, but an investment that will benefit our interconnected transportation system and our economy.

The Texas Transportation Institute's 2007 Urban Mobility Report, which is recognized as the foremost national traffic congestion publication, estimates that Chicago's transit system saves the region $800 million in time and fuel. That is the amount of road congestion saved by having a transit system – if it weren't for the transit network, road congestion would be 20 percent worse, more fuel would be wasted polluting our environment as cars idle in traffic, and people would have a hard time commuting to work. For those who have driven in Chicago, like Congressman Lipinski, I know it is a scary thought that traffic could be much worse than it is today.

As Members of this Committee know, transit doesn't just move people to work and school and alleviate congestion on the roads. Transit is an economic development tool that revitalizes cities and creates livable, walkable neighborhoods. A 2007 study in Chicago by the respected non-profit Metropolis 2020 shows that for every dollar spent on maintaining and expanding the transit system in Chicago, one dollar and thirty four cents is created in economic benefits. So the economic recovery package isn't simply a jobs bill. It is an economic development bill.

I applaud Chairman Oberstar and this Committee for crafting a bold transit package as part of the $825 billion House Economic Recovery bill, because it recognizes the fact that the country cannot simply build more roads to alleviate congestion and keep the economy moving. We have witnessed that firsthand in Chicago. Over the last 20 years, 3,000 lane miles have been added to the region's arterial, highway, and tollway network, a 20 percent increase in roadway capacity. Over the same period of time, congestion has doubled – the average amount of time a commuter spends in his or her car has increased from 22 hours a year to 46 hours a year. That is why it is so important that this Committee recognized transit's value and advocated for $12 billion in transit funding.

Unfortunately, that number was cut in the draft House bill. It is unfortunate not only that the transit number shrank, but the whole transportation number shrank. In Chicago and all around the nation people are told this economic recovery package is a transportation-based bill, but the fact is the House package contains roughly $50 billion out of $825 billion for true transportation projects. Hopefully this Committee will be successful in convincing your fellow House Members to increase funding for transportation and infrastructure.

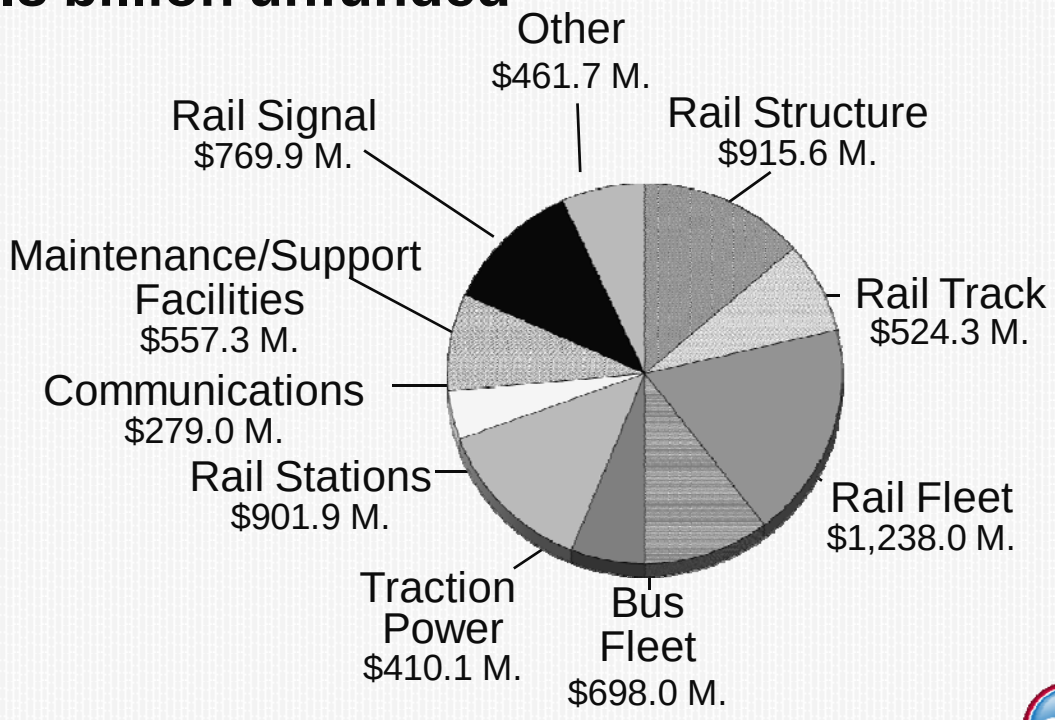
In closing I hope my testimony here today has given you a glimpse of the problems our transit system in Chicago faces, and the opportunities that a robust transit package in the economic recovery bill offers our riders and our region. I know Chicago's issues are a good example of the issues facing all large cities with older transit systems, so we are not alone in our plight and in our opportunities.

I would be happy to take any questions, and I thank the committee for your hard work in crafting a transportation package that will keep people and the economy moving.

# Attachment 1

## 2009 UNFUNDED CAPITAL NEED

- **$6.8 billion unfunded**



# Attachment 2

## RAIL TRACK -- $524.3 MILLION

- **1.2 million feet of track**
- **91,243+ feet (7.7%) of slow zones**
- **760,000 rail ties in system**

# Attachment 3

## RAIL STRUCTURE -- $915.6 MILLION

- **121 viaducts and bridges**
- **87.5 miles of 2-track elevated structure**
- **8.3 miles of embankment retaining walls**

# Attachment 4

## 1995 BUS W/ SIDEWALL DECAY

- **Average mileage for the 300 buses in this series is 450,000+ miles**