

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2008

Latest transit plan - new Schillerstrom end-around

In the latest transit plan - currently sitting on Gov. Blagojevich's desk - the sales tax in DuPage County would be increased by a half-percent and the county could use half of that half-percent for public safety.

I guess Schillerstrom didn't trust DuPage residents to make the right decision on the sales tax referendum so he went behind our backs.

A newspaper article is posted [here](#).

/s/ Robert "Bob" Brandt

Candidate for DuPage County Board - District 3

Governor holds up transit funding to get free rides for seniors

By Ray Long and Jeffrey Meitrodt

Tribune staff reporters

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SPRINGFIELD—State lawmakers today passed a bill to fund Chicago-area mass transit with a sales tax increase, but Gov. Rod Blagojevich said he wouldn't go along until lawmakers agreed to provide free bus and train rides for the state's senior citizens.

The governor's unusual move capped a frenetic 24-hour round of legislative negotiating that raised hopes of an agreement to end the monthslong funding fight and avert service cuts and fare hikes scheduled for Jan. 20. But the governor's decision will send the legislation back for further consideration in the House and Senate.

"We can't say that all's well that ends well, because this is not over yet," said Rep. Julie Hamos (D-Evanston).

Blagojevich had repeatedly vowed to veto the tax-hike plan over the last year but began to soften his opposition in recent weeks as it appeared lawmakers would send it to him. He said he saw the free rides as a way to ease the sting for people on fixed incomes.

"This was the only option I had as we approached the precipice," Blagojevich said at an afternoon news conference following the bill's one-two passage in the House and Senate.

Transit officials, who pushed for the bill passed by lawmakers, stood next to the governor and said they supported his change. But they warned they would not abandon their plans to raise prices and cut routes until the legislation is final.

"Until that piece of paper is done, the wheels in motion continue," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "I'm very, very optimistic, but we'll see what happens."

Hamos said she is nervous about getting enough votes to approve the governor's proposed change but hoped it could be accomplished next week.

↙ The legislation would increase the sales tax by a quarter of a percentage point in Cook County and a half percentage point in the five collar counties, which could use the extra money for transportation or public safety. The bill would also give Chicago the power to raise the city's real-estate transfer tax, a requirement under the deal that was first put together last summer.

The House vote of 62-51 came about an hour after the Senate passed the bill 30-25 without a vote to spare.

Blagojevich said he would not change the bill's tax provisions, but would add language requiring transit agencies to allow people 65 and older to use "main line and fixed route public transit service for free."

The governor said his action would come in the form of an amendatory veto, which would send the legislation back to the General Assembly.

Both the House and Senate would have to approve the governor's changes as written to enact them into law. Or they both could reject the changes by super-majority votes, which would mean their original version becomes law. If both chambers don't agree on whatever action to take, the entire bill remains in limbo.

Months of infighting between the Democratic governor and the Democratic-controlled legislature, particularly House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), created a stalemate that paralyzed the statehouse. The situation was further complicated by demands from Republicans and some Downstate Democrats for a statewide construction project that would have been funded by a huge gambling expansion.

Opposition in the House came from Downstate lawmakers of both parties who wanted to tie a mass transit solution for the CTA and suburban Pace bus system to a big ticket statewide construction program. Rep. Chapin Rose (R-Mahomet) lashed out at some of the Downstate Democrats who voted for the sales-tax increase, saying it became "abundantly clear" that they caved in to the "power base" of their colleagues from Chicago.


"What happened to the Downstate Democrats?" Rose said.

Madigan firmly but pointedly, stood at a lectern and noted he recently played a "significant role" in helping Downstate Mattoon land a major futuristic coal processing plant that will bring jobs and, proponents hope, reignite business in the Downstate coal mining industry. "I am from Chicago," Madigan said.

Rep. David Miller (D-Lynwood) underscored the need to act now.

"The citizens of Illinois need this, we demand it, and we expect it," Miller said.

The Senate approval came less than 24 hours after the same measure fell one vote short. Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) lobbied Sen. James Clayborne (D-East St. Louis) to vote for the mass-transit proposal.



The measure was helped by the addition of a provision to allow the suburban collar counties to use a portion of their sales-tax increase to fund public safety, a feature that helped attract the votes of three DuPage County senators.

The county has threatened to cut police and prosecutor jobs if voters don't approve a Feb. 5 tax increase.

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