
(January 26, 2009) Suntimes - U.S. jobs bill short on transit funds, say three in House

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/transportation/1397109,CST-NWS-rideside26.article>

Though President Obama is begging Congress to pass a jobs-stimulus bill, U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, his fellow Chicago Democrat, says he's "leaning against" voting for the bill in its current form -- because it contains too little for transportation.

"Clearly, the state of Illinois has greater needs than the state could receive under the current bill," said Lipinski, who's on the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Downstate Transportation Committee members Aaron Shock, a Republican, and Phil Hare, a Democrat, agree with Lipinski that the transportation portion is too small.

"There's very little for mass transit and rail," said Hare, who wants an Amtrak line from Chicago to Des Moines, Iowa.

The stimulus bill aims to create jobs in the sputtering economy. It allocates less than 8 percent of the \$825 billion for transportation projects, which, for Illinois, would mean about \$1 billion for roads and \$545 million for mass transit.

CTA Chairwoman Carole Brown told the Transportation Committee last week that the CTA could spend \$500 million within 90 days just fixing slow zones and buying new trains and buses.

"If you write me a check today, I'll be spending the money tomorrow," Brown said.

The committee submitted a bipartisan proposal to increase the transportation portion to \$90 billion, which the committee says would create or sustain 2.7 million of the 3.5 million jobs Obama wants from the bill.

Lipinski said transportation spending will create more jobs more quickly than most parts of the current bill.

"I really think this bill should be focused on job creation -- job creation that can be done in the next two years -- and transportation infrastructure is the way to go," Lipinski said.

The Obama administration wants to get the bill through both houses by Presidents Day, Feb. 16.

