

***Testimony of Carole L. Brown, Chairman
Chicago Transit Authority Board***

***Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation
and Community Development***

**Tuesday, August 4
2:30**

Room 538 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Vitter and Senators of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and address the needs of Chicago's transit system and the importance of the transportation authorization 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. We carry nearly 1.7 million rides per weekday on 242 miles of track and 154 bus routes throughout Chicago and Cook County. CTA is the primary transit agency in northeastern Illinois. We carry 80 percent of the transit riders in the Chicago region. We are the agency that

operates the “L”, the elevated train system that has become an iconic symbol of Chicago.

Sadly, that iconic symbol is aging and in poor health, as is our bus fleet and our subway system. Our oldest elevated rail, the North Mainline, was built between 1899 and 1900; our oldest subway, the State Street Red Line, was built during World War II; our oldest rail car still in operation dates to 1969 and it has 1.7 **million** miles on it; and our oldest bus garage, the 77th Street Garage, was built in 1907.

As you can see from the pie chart (attachment 1), CTA has a \$6.8 billion, five-year unfunded state of good repair need. This is in addition to our current fully funded five year, \$3 billion capital plan, and does not include expansion projects that total over \$4 billion. \$6.8 billion is the shortfall needed in order to bring our system to a state of good repair.

Our largest maintenance need - \$4 billion – is in the category of funding that Congress often calls “Rail Mod”. The \$4 billion includes:

\$900 million for rail stations and park-n-rides

\$915 million for basic rail structures like foundations, viaducts, and subway exhaust systems

\$525 million for track work, railroad ties and ballasts

\$410 million for power substations and contact rail and cables

The pictures of rail ties and rail structure (attachments 2 and 3) 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. We use 1200 rail cars to operate our system; 28 percent of this fleet is over 32 years old. The FTA standard for useful life is 25 years. Our rail fleet's **average** age is 24 years. We could replace two-thirds of our aging fleet of rail cars with \$1.2 billion.

We are thankful for all of the federal rail modernization and other formula funds we receive. In the past two years CTA has borrowed against future federal funds in order to reduce our 15 minute per mile slow zones from 30

percent of the rail system to just 7 percent. As we completed this repair work in 2008, CTA ridership increased 5 percent due in part 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 who had switched from driving to transit continued to ride the trains and buses rather than return to driving. Had we not fixed the slow zones when we did, those people new to transit would have become frustrated with slow, inefficient, and unreliable train service and quickly returned to commuting in their cars.

The whole point to my being here is to stress the importance of maintaining the nation's transit systems. A healthy transit system helps to alleviate congestion on the nation's roads. Indeed, a substantial and sustained investment in transit is critical to our nation's economic wellbeing.

That is why I was so pleased that 12 members of the Senate including Chairman Menendez and Senators Bayh, Dodd, and Schumer asked for a Federal Transit Administration report on the nation's rail modernization needs. The resulting FTA *Rail Modernization Study Report to Congress* found that fixed guideway funding is no longer being allocated solely to its intended recipients – rail transit systems – and that due to non-fixed guideway based entities such as high occupancy lanes, and bus lanes taking a share of the money, the intended recipients have seen their funding decline sharply. As a result, the seven largest rail transit systems, including CTA, New Jersey Transit, WMATA and the New York City MTA, carry 80 percent of the nation's rail riders but have witnessed their maintenance backlog grow to a collective \$50 billion. The CTA share of this figure is over \$4 billion, which in real terms means that CTA rail track and rail cars have grown past their useful life, thereby leading to an increase in rail slow zones to ensure safety on the rail system.

CTA is in dire need of modernization. Your leadership in addressing this issue for Chicago and many of the other older rail cities would go a long way to rectify this problem. The FTA report provides a blue print for modernizing the nation's fixed guideway systems by simplifying the Fixed Guideway Modernization Program so that funds are allocated based on age, type of rail system, and maintenance needs of a transit system.

Realignment of the program will likely lead to an increase in funds for true fixed guideway agencies such as CTA, New Jersey Transit, WMATA, and New York City MTA which means a faster, more efficient, and safer ride for our rail riders. I thank you Chairman Menendez for your leadership on this issue and ask the members of the committee to consider the FTA recommendations as you deliberate the transportation authorization bill in the coming months.

While CTA's rail system is in the greatest need of repair, I would be remiss if I didn't address our bus needs. 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 these national standards don't reflect the unique conditions of individual transit systems: CTA vehicles travel many more miles, carry far more people and operate in harsher climate conditions than the typical transit system. As you can see from the picture that is 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.

When I testified before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in January, Congressman Defazio of Oregon asked me how quickly CTA could spend any money it received from the proposed stimulus funding. Just one month after President Obama signed the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act the Chicago Transit Board proceeded with the purchase of 58 buses from New Flyer and approved a \$56.6 million contract for renewal of approximately 36,000 feet of track in the Blue Line Dearborn subway. This work will remove existing slow zones, prevent new slow zones from developing, and is expected to be

completed by the end of this year. Indeed, on April 20, Senator Durbin joined us as we broke ground on the project—the first major transit project to be paid for with ARRA funds. CTA will also use the ARRA funds for:

Preventive Maintenance - projects are fully spent and 100% complete - \$75.2 M

Replacement Buses - 11 buses delivered out of 58; project is 19% complete. Target final delivery by October 2009 - \$50 M

Kedzie Garage HVAC Replacement - project is 2-3 weeks from being fully encumbered. Target completion is November 1 - \$5.5 M

North Park Garage Oil/Water Separator - Staff will recommend award of construction bid at August CTA Board - \$2.4 M

Subway Escalators - Project is underway, construction continues - \$4.8 M

Reconstruct Rail Stations - \$14.4 M

Cermak Station Rehabilitation - Zoning work in process, design work in process, permitting in process - \$12.5 M

Belmont/Fullerton Canopy Extensions - CTA Board approval July 15, target completion date is December 2009 - \$1.9 M

I want to thank every member of the Senate for their leadership in passing this much needed stimulus bill that will create over 1500 jobs just through projects for CTA alone.

Finally, while I've focused on capital, it is worth noting that transit also has operating needs. National transit ridership has reached 50-year highs with over 10 billion trips taken in 2008. CTA alone provided half a billion of these trips. Yet ironically, transit providers throughout the country are raising fares and cutting back on well-utilized service because of shortfalls in operating funding. Earlier this year CTA increased its monthly passes from \$75 to \$86. We've experienced a \$190 million, or 20%, decrease in the operating subsidy that we receive from the State of Illinois this year and expect it to remain flat in 2010. Cutbacks of this magnitude will force a reduction in service and possibly another increase in fares. People will be forced back into their cars; the unemployed, seniors, and disabled could be stranded. I appreciate the efforts to allow the use of stimulus funds for operations. But as I pointed out, CTA's capital needs are so great that diverting scarce capital resources to operating expenses further erodes our ability to maintain a viable transit system for the citizens of Chicago.

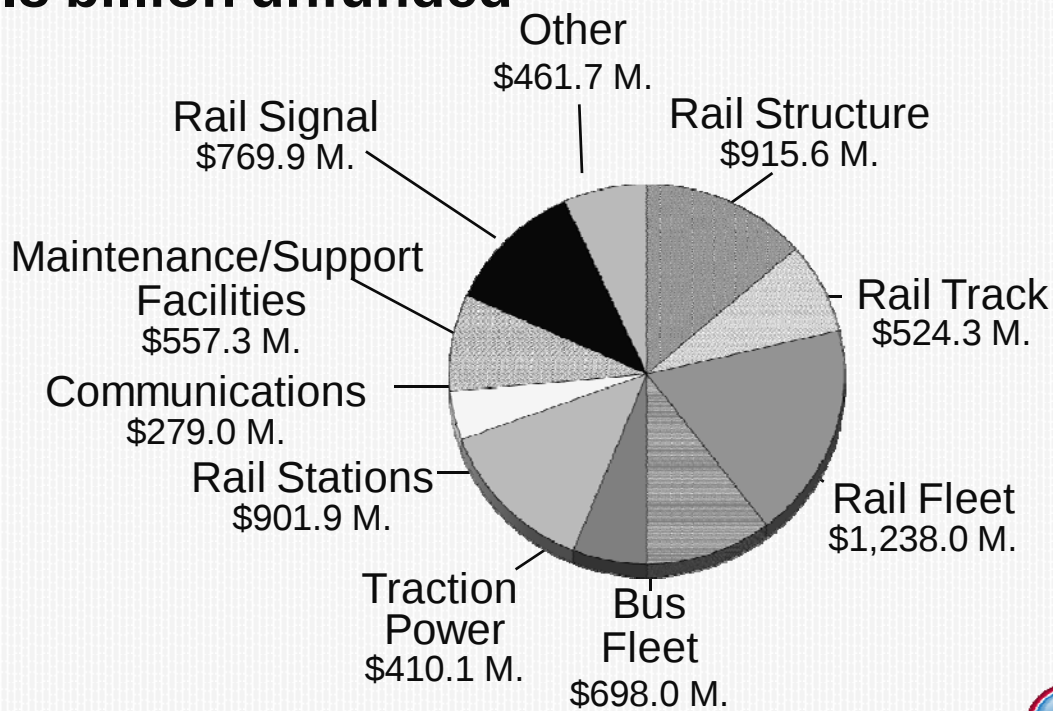
I hope my testimony here today has given you a glimpse of the challenges the Chicago Transit Authority faces, but also the great opportunities robust transit systems offers for the nation's economic well-being. I know Chicago's issues are a good example of the issues facing all large cities with older 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**

