



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

# NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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## **Gov. Blagojevich, seniors urge General Assembly to approve Governor's plan to provide free public transportation to seniors**

*Governor accepts mass transit solution passed by legislature, but changes bill to protect seniors from impact of .25% sales tax increase approved by lawmakers*

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today joined senior citizens at Mather's - More Than A Cafe on Chicago's northwest side to urge members of the Illinois General Assembly to quickly return to Springfield and approve his improvements to a long-term mass transit funding bill. Yesterday, after lawmakers in both chambers approved a CTA funding bill that relies in part on a .25% increase in the sales tax in Chicago and surrounding counties, the Governor said he will rewrite the bill to minimize the impact on senior citizens by allowing them to use public transportation for free.

"These seniors I'm here with today know better than anyone how hard it would be to absorb a higher sales tax without making difficult sacrifices. I've said clearly and frequently that I don't think raising the sales tax is the right way to help the CTA and other transit agencies. But, this is what lawmakers sent me and in the spirit of compromise, I will accept their plan, but only if they accept my plan to make public transportation free for all Illinois seniors," the Governor said. "Now it's up to lawmakers to act quickly so buses and trains will keep running, and seniors will have an easier time getting where they need to go."

The Governor asked senior citizens at Mather's - More Than A Cafe to help the transit crisis reach an end by calling their legislators and urging them to accept the Governor's amendatory veto next week. Lawmakers have until January 20 to take final action on a long-term transit funding bill or the CTA will begin implementing service cuts, fare hikes and lay-offs.

The Governor's amendatory veto will require transit agencies statewide to allow senior citizens, aged 65 and older, to use main line and fixed route public transit service for free. A senior who uses public transportation twice a week could save \$176 a year on CTA fares, \$156 a year on

Pace fares and \$405 a year on Metra fares. There are approximately 1.3 million seniors living in communities across Illinois that have mass transit service.

"We are very grateful that the Governor has made free public transportation for seniors an integral part of the mass transit bill. This will help thousands of people living on fixed incomes get to where they need to go on trains and buses throughout the state. On behalf of Metro Seniors In Action and my fellow seniors statewide, I want to thank the Governor and urge legislators to quickly pass this bill," said Beryl Clemens, Board Member of Metro Seniors in Action.

HB 656 provides over \$494 million in new, recurring funding for the Regional Transportation Authority, which includes the Chicago Transit Authority, Metra and Pace; and another \$50 million for transit agencies in other parts of Illinois. With a long-term funding plan in place, the Chicago area transit agencies have said they will not cut services, raise fares or lay-off workers on January 20, as planned. The legislation also implements important pension and oversight reforms within the RTA.

As soon as the legislature sends HB 656 to the Governor, he will submit his amendatory veto to legislators for their approval.