

# PRESS RELEASE

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**For Immediate Release**

**Date:** February 11, 2008

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**Mayor Luecke, Mayor Oberlie and Business Organizations Support**

**Chicago South Shore Rail Funding**

Mayor Stephen J. Luecke, Mayor Charles Oberlie and local business leaders announced today their support for HB 1220 which provides funding for major improvements to the South Shore Commuter rail system in St. Joseph and La Porte counties. Sixty other municipalities, organizations, unions, and businesses have already announced their support of the expansion of the South Shore.

A \$6.4 million annual funding stream is being sought to match federal funds on a dollar for dollar basis. The federal funds would come from the Federal Transit Administration and from the Federal Railroad Administration's Section 9002 railroad relocation program authorized under SAFETEA-LU.

Improvements to the line will include a relocation (reconfiguration) of the rail line serving the South Bend Regional Airport as well as planning and funding of needed improvements in Michigan City. The funding will also enable the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District to complete an ongoing modernization of its overhead power and signal systems in La Porte and St. Joseph counties. The existing signal and power systems date back to 1926 when legendary utilities tycoon Samuel Insull purchased and upgraded the South Shore.

Since moving to the Airport in 1992, the South Shore has seen over a 200 percent increase in ridership out of South Bend compared with a 26% increase in overall South Shore ridership

during the same period. The new route will also enhance safety by eliminating at least 16 grade crossings in South Bend.

“A two-hour trip from South Bend to downtown Chicago will boost ridership on the South Shore and strengthen our economic ties with the Midwest’s largest city. With the affordability and quality of life that South Bend offers, this reduced travel time makes us a more competitive alternative for housing and business opportunities,” said Luecke. “The new route configuration, in addition to being faster and more direct, makes the South Shore a safer choice for commuters. Air travelers at South Bend Regional Airport can only benefit from the strengthening of our mass-transit network.”

“The South Shore has long been an important part of Michigan City’s economy and it is important that as our city continues to rebuild itself that we make the best use of this asset and continue to invest in it,” said Oberlie. “Our city has much to offer not only to daily commuters but also to people with summer homes who travel to the city. This is a regional issue that requires regional cooperation in order to achieve the service improvements that our communities need to move forward.”

Tim Bietry, President of the Michigan City Area Chamber of Commerce emphasized, “During our recent studies of redevelopment of the North End of the city the South Shore was recognized as not only a great asset but also a great opportunity. Connectivity to other communities whether it be to the east or the west is critical to our future growth as a region. We need to make sure we develop multi-modal types of facilities where rail is connected to other forms of mass transit.”

HB 1220 is also receiving support from the Michigan City Economic Development Corporation, Michigan City Area Chamber of Commerce and St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce.

HB 1220 passed the House on January 29, 2008. The bill is currently pending before the Indiana State Senate.

Funds will be generated by special districts to be established under the bill in Lake, Porter, La Porte, and St. Joseph Counties. The bill provides for improvements to the West Lake line as well as extensions to Lowell and Valparaiso. The improvements will encourage economic growth through greater access to the Chicago market by workers and businesses from Indiana.

Other benefits include reduction of dependency on foreign oil, a decrease in highway system demands which will reduce maintenance and replacement requirements as well as reducing travel times.