

(May 21, 2008) Lipinski Hosts Roundtable Talk with With Hastert and Poshard

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Transportation Needs Detailed

Lipinski Hosts Roundtable Talk with With Hastert and Poshard

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Cong. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd) gathered local politicians, business leaders and educators for a round-table discussion last week about transportation needs with former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert and former congressman Glenn Poshard on the last stop of their statewide bipartisan 'listening tour' to promote Illinois Works, Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposed \$25 billion capital improvement program.

Lipinski said Friday that the main issues discussed at the meeting in the Bedford Park hotel complex on Cicero Avenue were the need for state funding to continue the CREATE Rail Modernization Program and funding to get started on what is being called the Central Avenue Bypass.

The bypass, which has been under discussion since the 1970s as a way to relieve congestion on Harlem and Cicero avenues, would link Burbank with Bedford Park and Chicago via Central Avenue.

Currently, railroad yards prevent a through-traffic on Central between roughly 74th and 65th Streets, but there are now tentative plans to build an underpass connecting the two sections of Central.

Lipinski said the Republican Hastert and Poshard, a former Democratic gubernatorial candidate and current president of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, took a tour of the area while they were in town.

"They were able to see where railroad grade improvements are needed, as well as the Central Avenue situation," Lipinski said. "I am happy that they made this area a stop on their tour. It is an indication of how important our issues are to the state as a whole.

"These two projects are vitally important to the 3rd District and the state. CREATE is desperately needed to ease congestion on our rail lines and on our roads; it will save time and money for motorists, and help speed passenger rail service.

"And the Central Avenue Bypass is a long-needed solution to ease the congestion on Cicero and Harlem Avenues and promote economic growth."

Among the politicians at the meeting were state Sen. Louis S. Viverito (D-11th), state Rep. Robert Molaro (D-21st), Bedford Park Mayor David Brady; Bridgeview Mayor Steve Landek, and Chicago Ald. Michael Zalewski (23rd).

Business leaders there included Dennis Gannon, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor; Clayton Harris, of Illinois Department of Transportation; Anita Cummings, executive director of the United Business Association of Midway; and Mary Ann Dybala, president of the Garfield Ridge Chamber of Commerce.

James Muting, principal of St. Laurence High School, signified the importance of the Central Avenue bypass to that school, which is at 77th and Central in Burbank.

Lipinski said that - as Muting pointed out - if students coming from Chicago were able to use Central Avenue, they would no longer have to take two or three buses to get to the school, which is now only accessible from 79th Street. The same could be said for neighboring Queen of Peace High School.

Lipinski has already helped to secure more than \$100 million in federal funding for the CREATE program, which is also being funded by the railroad industry.

He said work has been able to start on some CREATE projects, which mainly involve improving railroad crossings to limit traffic tie-ups caused by idling freight trains at blocked crossings as much as possible.

Some of the money would also improve Metra Service. But state funding must also be allocated for it, he said.

Lipinski acknowledging that getting Blagojevich's transportation bill through the state Legislature might be difficult, due to the antagonism between the governor and many legislators. But he is guardedly optimistic that it can be done this year.

"I would say I am hopeful. This funding is needed," said the congressman.

He added that if Illinois approved transportation infrastructure funding, it would help him when the Congress considers its own transportation bill next year to "make the best case possible for bringing back to the district even more than the \$126 million I secured in the last bill."