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## U.S. 20 listed as a key travel project

By Thomas V. Bona

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FREEPORT —

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Tri-State Travel's buses regularly take tourists between its base in Galena and Chicago. Every time, they use U.S. 20.

"I had a driver tell me the other day, 'Well, if it gets too bumpy or too noisy, we just turn up the music so people don't hear it,' " said Dave Lange, the company's president. "It's time people did something about it."

Several other businessmen from northern Illinois and eastern Iowa listed U.S. 20 as one of their key transportation projects for that area during a regional transportation summit Monday. But the long-discussed project to rebuild the road into a four-lane highway between Freeport and Galena, a total 50 miles, would cost a billion dollars, according to an Illinois Department of Transportation official.

The project would ease congestion caused by increasing tourist and truck traffic on what is the primary east/west route in that area, officials say, and spur more tourism and commerce.

"Does it need it? Yes, there's no doubt," said George Ryan, deputy director of highways for this region. "(But) as we look at limited transportation dollars, we try to prioritize those. It's going to be tougher to get funding for long stretches of four-lane highway."

That's why he commended the more than 300 government, transportation and business

leaders from Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa who met Monday in the first Tri-State Alliance summit. They discussed key transportation projects for the region over the next decade and ways to fund them.

Working as a region — and not as isolated cities and counties — is the key to economic development in the 21st century, said keynote speaker Mark Drabenstott, director of the Rural Policy Research Institute's Center for Regional Competitiveness.

"Most of the region is losing ground in the race for jobs. It's losing even more ground when we think about income," Drabenstott said. "It's no longer an option to view Rockford and Dubuque as competitors on the global stage. They are far more partners than competitors."

Several speakers said it was key for the region to "speak with one voice" to push certain priorities, because then they'll have the support of senators, congressmen and other leaders from all three states.

"It's very important to keep that pressure on," Ryan said. "We have so many needs. And really, it's up to you to get us the funding so that we can address the needs."

Other key projects discussed include restored Amtrak service between Rockford, Chicago and Dubuque; a bypass around the west side of Rockford and Beloit, Wis.; rebuilt and widened interstates 90 and 43 in southern Wisconsin and new Illinois Tollway interchanges in Rockford, Belvidere and Rochelle.

The biggest roadblock to transportation improvements in northern Illinois is in Springfield, said U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan. The state can't use federal transportation funds until it ponies up its own money.

"We've not seen a capital budget for eight years. Meanwhile, the project costs are going up and we're missing an opportunity to spend billions of dollars and create thousands of jobs," Manzullo said. "The lack of action by (Gov. Rod Blagojevich) could impede the ability of the Illinois congressional delegation to secure higher levels of funding."

Manzullo told the group that cooperation between all levels of government, from cities and towns up through Congress, is the key to getting projects done. For example, he said the Amtrak project won't be complete when the first train goes from Dubuque to Chicago.

"If Amtrak comes and you don't use it, forget it," he said. "You have to use your own dollars to keep enough traffic on a new passenger line service. Sometimes you work hard to bring in something and you don't have the local support."

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### **Transportation priorities**

These projects have been identified by members of the Tri-State Alliance as transportation priorities for northern Illinois, eastern Iowa and southern Wisconsin over the next decade:

#### **Illinois**

1. U.S. 20 between Freeport and Galena: A new four-lane highway on a mostly new 51-mile route. Environmental study is under way, but bulk of project is awaiting funding.
2. Illinois 173 between Illinois 251 and Interstate 90 in Machesney Park: Widening and modernization of the road. Engineering is complete, project is in proposed Illinois capital bill but awaiting its passage.
3. I-90/39 between Rockton and Newburg roads in the Rockford area: Widening of the 14-mile stretch of road to six lanes is under way, to be completed in 2009.
4. I-90/39 between Rockton Road and Wisconsin state line: Widening of the 3-mile stretch of road to six lanes. Project proposed to happen at same time as Wisconsin project (see No. 12 below).
5. I-90 and I-39 interchange in Cherry Valley: Reconfiguration and modernization of interchange is under way, to be completed in 2009.
6. I-90 and Irene Road interchange, along with extension of Illinois 76, Belvidere: Project segments are in various stages of design, with one ramp to be built this year.
7. I-90/39 and Perry Creek Parkway interchange, Rockford: New interchange concept is under preliminary review.

8. Interstate 88 interchange near Intermodal Drive, Rochelle: New interchange concept is under preliminary review.

### **Illinois/Wisconsin**

9. Rockford and Beloit western bypass (“Interstate 139”) between U.S. 20 and Wisconsin 11: A new interstate highway. Feasibility study proposal is being put together.

### **Illinois/Iowa**

10. Amtrak between Chicago and Dubuque: Restoration of the 185-mile line is planned. Funding for the rail upgrades and operating assistance are in proposed Illinois capital plan but awaiting passage.

11. U.S. bridge over the Mississippi River, between East Dubuque and Dubuque: A new four-lane bridge. Environmental study under way.

### **Wisconsin**

12. I-90/39 between Illinois State line and Madison: Widening of the 50-mile stretch of road to six lanes. Environmental study complete but project awaiting funding.

13. I-90/39 and Interstate 43 interchange, Beloit: Reconstruction and modernization of interchange, plus repaving of I-43. Environmental study has been completed.

14. Wisconsin 11 between U.S. 51 and U.S. 14 in Janesville: Widening and modernization of the road. Environmental study under way.

### **Iowa**

15. Iowa 32 (“Southwest Arterial Connector”) in Dubuque: a new six-mile road connecting U.S. 20 and U.S. 61. Environmental study under way.