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CONTACT
Hugh Ryan
Ryan Wellnitz & Associates
Barrington, Rhode Island
(401) 246-2300
hryan@ryanwellnitz.com
www.rhodework.com

November Ballot Referendum 1: Funding for Highways, Bridges, Mass Transit

\$87.2 million in state bonds with \$436 million in federal matching funds will create 5,000+ jobs

WARWICK, R.I. – Rhode Island ballot Referendum 1 this November will give voters the opportunity to approve \$87.2 million in state transportation bonds. In combination with \$436 million in federal matching funds over two years, the bonds will provide \$523 million for necessary construction and repair of highways and bridges, and will also fund mass transit. This constitutes a 5 : 1 ratio of federal matching funds to state debt.

Of the bond total, \$80 million will fund highways, roads and bridges. Federal matching funds of \$200 million per year for two years bring the total for transportation infrastructure to \$480 million. The rest of the \$523 million will be allocated to mass transit.

5,000+ JOBS TO BE CREATED

In supporting an “Approve” vote of Referendum 1, Construction Industries of Rhode Island (CIRI), www.rhodework.com said this is the only practical, viable way to finance the state’s urgent need for infrastructure improvement. In addition, CIRI says the funding will create more than 5,000 construction and related jobs in Rhode Island.

The state contains 1,100 miles of roads and 754 bridges, and has pressing needs for repair and reconstruction. The recently imposed 18-ton limit on Route 24 across the Sakonnet River Bridge in Tiverton is forcing the rerouting of tour buses to Newport’s mansions and other tourist attractions. This is “very alarming to business on Aquidneck Island,” Evan Smith, president of the Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said in the *Providence Journal*.

Replacement of the I-95 Pawtucket River Bridge, with its weight and axel restrictions imposed this year, will cost \$100 million, according to Michael P. Lewis, director of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation.

A partial list of other important projects would include rehabilitation of the 49-year-old Great Island Bridge, I-95 viaduct bridge in downtown Providence, I-195 Taunton-Warren Avenues interchange in East Providence, the Warren River bridges conveying Routes 114 and 103 between Barrington and Warren, East Main Road in Middletown, and the Apponaug bypass-circulator in West Warwick. Bike trails and greenways in Coventry, Providence, and the East Bay and mass transit stations will also be funded by the bond and matching federal funds.

Among factors challenging the state's ability to fund transportation infrastructure is a drop in fuel-tax receipts as Americans, reacting to rising gasoline prices, drive less. At the same time, the cost of asphalt and other construction materials is rising.

RHODE ISLAND REFLECTS NATIONAL TRENDS

The federal Department of Transportation says that 25 percent of the nation's bridges are "structurally deficient," and the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission estimates the country needs \$225 billion annually for transportation infrastructure. Spending is currently about 40 percent of this total. Robert Yaro of the Regional Plan Association for New York – New Jersey – Connecticut, says that America is headed toward having a third-world infrastructure.

In 2006, more than 60 percent of Rhode Island voters cast ballots to authorize \$88.5 million for highway, bridge and transit improvements. This earned \$394 million in federal matching funds.

If voters disapprove the referendum, those federal matching funds will go to other states. CIRI believes that a vote to approve Referendum I this year is essential to the state's economy and to every driver's ability to move about the state efficiently and safely.

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