



Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor / Jack Lavin, Director

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Demolition Starts On Cherry Valley Toll Plaza Fulfilling Opportunity Returns Promise

Governor Blagojevich On Hand To Kick-Off Work And To Announce Additional Enhancements Planned For South Beloit Toll Plaza



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ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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ROCKFORD – Gov. Rod Blagojevich returned to Rockford today to make good on an *Opportunity Returns* promise to the Rock River Valley region – elimination of the southbound exit toll at the Cherry Valley Toll Plaza on the Northwest Tollway (I-90) by year's end. These improvements are all part of the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* program, a major economic initiative announced in October designed to spur growth in the Rock River Valley region. *Opportunity Returns*, which involves more than 20 state agencies, is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs to date in Illinois.

"Improving the area's toll plazas to reduce congestion is a major step in my efforts to make this region more accessible, more marketable, and more attractive to employers," Blagojevich said. "Although payment of tolls is necessary to keep these roads well maintained and in good shape, these toll plazas should not impede the vital flow of commerce in this area."

The Governor, Illinois Tollway Board Member Carl Towns, Tollway Executive Director Jack Hartman and Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Director Jack Lavin were all on

hand to begin demolition of the plaza and to announce additional plans to ease congestion in the region at the South Beloit toll plaza.

As part of this initiative, the Illinois Tollway is removing the portion of the Cherry Valley Toll Plaza used by eastbound drivers to exit the Northwest Tollway. Exiting drivers will be diverted around the work area until the project's scheduled completion by year's end.

To cover the revenue lost by the removal of half of the Cherry Valley toll plaza, the toll rate at the nearby South Beloit Toll Plaza will increase by 10 cents from 40 to 50 cents. The additional revenue generated will be invested in significant improvements to the South Beloit Toll Plaza. New I-PASS express lanes, similar to those in place on I-355, will be constructed in both directions beginning in spring 2004. I-PASS Express lanes allow I-PASS users to travel through the plaza at highway speeds, reducing congestion and wait-time for all drivers.

"The Illinois Tollway plays a vital role in the northern Illinois economy by allowing the movement of people, goods and services in and out of the region," Towns said. "We are confident that these improvements will increase the efficiency of our system and help boost the area's economy."

"Governor Blagojevich is making sure that Illinois is doing everything possible to reach our economic potential. This is another important step forward as *Opportunity Returns* continues throughout the Rock River Valley," Lavin said.

Other important progress has been made since the Governor launched *Opportunity Returns* in the Rock River Valley in October. On October 30th, an Opportunity Fair was held in Rockford as part of "*Buy Illinois*," which is increasing opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, including minority, female-owned and disabled-owned companies, to learn how to sell their products and services to government agencies.

Governor Blagojevich is also pleased to announce workforce training grants for two Rockford companies as part of his "*21st Century Jobs*" Training Initiative. The grants are being awarded through the Employer Training Investment Program's (ETIP) Small/Mid-sized Company component and will be used to upgrade the skills of almost 125 local employees. Roper Whitney of Rockford, Inc. is receiving \$48,834 to help train all 97 of its employees. Rockford Ball Screw Co. is being awarded \$22,952 to help upgrade 25 employees. DCEO administers the ETIP grants, which reimburse companies and organizations for up to 50 percent of the costs of training their employees.

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