

Mt. Vernon to host regional transportation summit

BY MATT BARBA

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Mt. Vernon will play host next week to one of three regional summits being held around the state to discuss transportation infrastructure improvements.

Doug Whitley, president of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, explained that the Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC) is "totally devoted to promoting continued expansion and modernization of transportation networks in Illinois."

The summits, of which one has already been held in Elgin and another is planned for Macomb, as well as the Mt. Vernon summit scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to 1:35 p.m. Wednesday at Mt. Vernon Airport Banquet Room, are meant to help promote public interest and investment in infrastructure

improvements.

"Up until now we've always had a single annual meeting in the western suburbs of Chicago, but because of recent changes to federal laws, we've decided to make the move to these regional meetings," said Whitley, who founded the TFIC.

"Already we're satisfied with the change," said Whitley, adding



Doug Whitley

"... because of recent changes to federal laws, we've decided to make the move to these regional meetings."

Please see **Summit**, Page 3A

Summit:

Continued From Page 1A

that 126 people attended last week's summit in Elgin. "All three of the programs are different because we've tried to tailor them to the regions where we will be meeting."

The summit will be conducted in an extended luncheon format and will feature several speakers, as well as panel discussions on various issues.

Following remarks from Whitley and Mt. Vernon Mayor Mary Jane Chesley, a lunch will be served, and that will be followed by a Federal Transportation Update presented by Sean O'Neill, director of Congressional Relations on Infrastructure Advancement for the Associated General Contractors of America.

Also speaking will be Jeff South, bureau chief for the Illinois Department of Transportation's Bureau of Statewide Program Planning.

Mary Ellen Bechtel of the Jefferson County Development Corporation and Ted Shekell, planning director for the City of O'Fallon, will present a panel on the economic impact of transportation investment.

Matt Davidson of the Associated General Contractors of Illinois, a TFIC member and the group that represents the state's road builders, said Thursday that the panel

being put on by Bechtel and Shekell is important because of the economic impact that infrastructure upgrades can have on communities.

"Transportation is important and we have to have access," said Davidson. "In the last stimulus bill, only 6 percent of funds were spent on infrastructure but 24 percent of the jobs came from transportation. Everybody needs a sound transportation plan and four to one is a great return on investment."

Davidson said transportation is important because when it comes to legislation there should not be a partisan issue.

"Transportation is unique. When we're implementing these plans properly there isn't an 'R' or a 'D' next to it. That's something we're proud of in this state and we know things get done by working together," said Davidson.

Whitley said the summit is not only a chance to celebrate the good things that are coming up in Illinois transportation, as well as the victories that have been won recently, but also to get feedback from the public on where priorities lie.

"In each case the objective is to take the TFIC message around the state to get more exposure on what's happening in transportation," said Whitley. "By being in the community we can get feedback from local community leaders and the citizens in the towns that these projects will be affecting."

8-10-12
mbarba@morningsentinel.com