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Public transit boosters always brag about how much money is saved and pollution prevented by keeping cars off the roads.

A report commissioned by an Illinois nonprofit puts some numbers behind the boasts.

Around the country, public transit saves 3.4 billion gallons of oil each year, prevents 541 million hours of traffic delay and reduces global warming pollution by 26 million tons, according to a report commissioned by the Illinois Public Interest Research Group.

In northeastern Illinois, public transit saved 276 million gallons of oil, or $723 million that would have been spent on gas. Those are 2006 figures, when gas was $2.76 a gallon -- the national average is now $3.26.

The CTA is the biggest contributor -- saving almost $475 million in fuel costs in 2006 and 1.3 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions, according to the report. It is followed by Metra, which saved $216 million in fuel.

"This report shows why it would be a mistake to not meet our transit infrastructure needs," said state Rep. Julie Hamos (D-Evanston), who is working with others on a capital bill for the state.

The need is urgent, according to Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), who appeared with Hamos at a news conference announcing the study. Illinois risks losing $4.1 billion in federal transportation funding unless it can come up with a $2.7 billion match this year.