

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

FROM: Kyle Christianson, Director of Government Affairs

DATE: December 6, 2016

SUBJECT: 2017-19 WisDOT Budget Request

There has been significant debate among infrastructure stakeholders since the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) submitted its 2017-19 budget proposal to the Governor in mid-September. Over the past few months, the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) has reviewed the proposal and traveled the state sharing the budget plan with counties. This culminated with an unprecedented “Turnout for Transportation” event where local officials from throughout the state came together on a single night to discuss transportation. The resounding takeaway from those meetings was clear: we must find a long-term solution to funding our state’s infrastructure needs.

There is no debate over the necessity of the county aid increases included in the WisDOT budget. The budget provides an 8.1 percent increase in county general transportation aids (GTA) over the biennium; money counties use to maintain the county trunk highway system. The budget also increases funding for the local bridge program by \$5 million and provides an 11 percent increase over the biennium in the Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP).

Counties appreciate the local aid increases included in the WisDOT budget. It is important, however, to acknowledge the current state of the county highway system. According to best practices, county highways should be resurfaced every 20-25 years. Based on a survey completed by the Wisconsin County Highway Association, which inventoried the actual miles resurfaced on the county system over the last five years, the average resurfacing cycle currently stands at 86 years. Best practices also indicate the reconstruction lifespan of a county highway ranges from 40-50 years. Again, based on survey results, the average county road reconstruction cycle is 196 years—nearly four-times longer than the expected life of a properly engineered and constructed road.

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Based on this reality, it should come as no surprise that significant needs remain at the local level. The only solution to funding our local transportation needs are ongoing, sustainable aid increases made possible through a growing state transportation fund.

Since the release of the WisDOT budget counties have been asked if the proposed increases are adequate. Counties have responded that the budget should not simply be viewed in a vacuum, but rather in a broader context that considers what impact this plan will have on budgets two, six, or ten years from now. Counties are less concerned with the specific percentage of aid increases in any single year, and are more concerned that an increase be sustained and increased upon in future years. With a shrinking transportation “pie,” this is unquestionably not possible. The lack of a long-term solution to funding infrastructure leaves Wisconsin with a transportation network—from local roads and bridges to state highways and interstates—that continues to deteriorate.

If Wisconsin is to be successful in the future, our private sector needs to thrive. This requires smart young talent, available capital for growth and expansion of facilities, and a strong soft and hard infrastructure. Wisconsin appears poised to begin addressing the soft infrastructure of broadband with the Governor’s announcement last week of the state’s investment to expand broadband in rural Wisconsin. The hard infrastructure (our surface transportation network) appears to be more of a challenge and yet it is precisely what is needed if we are to have a thriving and vibrant private sector in this state.

We encourage the committee to work with legislative colleagues and the Governor to ensure the proposed local aid increases are sustainable by finding a long-term solution to our state’s infrastructure needs.

Please feel free to contact WCA if you need additional information.

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