



June 23, 2015

Representative Robin Vos
Assembly Speaker
211 West State Capitol

Senator Scott Fitzgerald
Senate Majority Leader
211 South State Capitol

Representative John Nygren
Assembly Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee
309 East State Capitol

Senator Alberta Darling
Senate Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee
317 East State Capitol

Dear Joint Finance Committee Co-Chairs and Legislative Leaders,

From local road maintenance to critical infrastructure expansion, Wisconsin demands adequate funding to meet its transportation needs. I write to ask that you do everything possible to adopt a sustainable, long-term funding plan for this biennium and beyond. Delays in projects, like the widening of I-39/90, will negatively impact Wisconsin's economy and will only cost road users in the long run. I ask members of the Joint Finance Committee, and legislative leaders, to explore all possible options to approve a transportation budget that fully funds road maintenance and keeps projects on track.

Borrowing \$1.3 billion over the biennium is not a responsible solution to fund transportation. While the legislature should significantly reduce this level of bonding, cutting projects to do so instead of raising revenue is equally irresponsible. The need for these projects will not go away, and local roads will not repair themselves. Revenue we fail to raise now will simply need to be raised in the future, but the positive economic impact of improving our infrastructure will be deferred unnecessarily.

The need for transportation funding has been well documented, and numerous ideas have been put forward to raise the necessary revenue to avoid borrowing. Department of Transportation Secretary Gottlieb, legislators, and advocacy groups have all identified possible solutions that could be part of a comprehensive funding solution. While no one perfect funding mechanism exists, there are several that, when added together, will help make up a sustainable solution to meet Wisconsin's needs now and in the future.

Rather than debating how to "share the pain" of cutting projects, we should be discussing how to share the gain that will come from responsibly funding our transportation system. The I-39/90 expansion in south-central Wisconsin is just one example of a project that would bring additional dollars to Wisconsin through commerce and tourism. Illinois has kept up its end of the bargain by widening this artery to the Wisconsin state line. We only stand to lose by delaying the work on our side of the border, yet that is exactly what would happen if bonding is cut without raising new revenue.

45TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Should transportation borrowing be reduced and no accompanying revenue collections implemented, we must distribute project cuts fairly to deal with the resulting fallout. No region of the state should receive more than its fair share of the limited funding remaining to complete its project while leaving the rest of the state to suffer potholes and traffic bottlenecks. The ongoing discussion on how to fairly distribute these harmful effects highlights the damage that would be done across our state by taking this short-sighted approach, and is entirely avoidable.

As elected officials, we rarely receive contacts from such a diverse lineup of constituents, business groups, and local newspaper editorials all pleading with us to raise taxes or fees. Yet those are exactly the contacts I have received on this issue, and my experience is not unique among my fellow legislators.

From local governments to chambers of commerce, many advocacy groups have reached out to the public and to legislators, focusing on the importance of solving this ongoing problem, and solving it now. Moreover, the constitutional amendment overwhelmingly approved by voters last November laid the groundwork for a sustainable funding solution by ensuring that any dollar raised from taxes or fees associated with transportation may only be spent on transportation.

With popular support and policy safeguards already in place, the legislature cannot kick the can down the road any further, slashing the transportation budget and hoping that a future legislature and a future governor will do the responsible thing. We must solve this problem now.

I stand ready to work with members from both parties to find a funding solution in this biennium that can receive bipartisan and veto-proof support in both the Assembly and the Senate. Legislators are elected to lead, and leadership requires making responsible choices that safeguard our state's future. If Republicans are unable to find transportation funding solutions solely within their caucus, I ask Republican members of the Joint Finance Committee and Republican leaders to work with Democrats to find a way forward. I call on all members of the Joint Finance Committee to reject any transportation budget that leaves the hard choices for another day and leaves Wisconsin's roads unfunded.

Sincerely,



Rep. Mark Spreitzer
45th Assembly District

Cc: Joint Finance Committee Members
Representative Jim Steineke, Assembly Majority Leader
Representative Peter Barca, Assembly Minority Leader
Senator Mary Lazich, Senate President
Senator Jennifer Shilling, Senate Minority Leader