



*"...meeting community needs...enhancing quality of life."*

**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

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April 29, 2009

Dear Member of the Joint Committee on Finance:

I am visiting your office today to ask that you support the provision in the Governor's budget proposal to create a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority.

Allow me to explain why this issue is not only critical to the future of public transportation in the Fox Cities, but to transportation funding for transit systems across the State of Wisconsin.

Valley Transit is the public transit system serving the urbanized area of the Fox Cities and is owned and operated by the City of Appleton. Valley Transit operates fixed route bus service serving the Fox Cities Urbanized Area, contracts for shared ride taxi service in an area currently outside of the fixed route system, contracts for a connector service connecting employees with places of employment needing public transit service outside the normal operating hours of the fixed route service, and contracts with Outagamie County, Calumet County, and Winnebago County for ADA paratransit service. Funding for Valley Transit consists of Federal and State operating assistance along with property tax contributions from three counties, four cities, two villages, three towns, as well as grants from community partners in the Fox Cities Urbanized Area.

Despite the fact that Valley Transit is owned and operated by the City of Appleton, Valley Transit services as well as funding for Valley Transit make it truly a regional transit system. In recognition of this, the City of Appleton opened up membership on its Transit Commission to representatives of our funding partners over a decade ago.

However, today, funding for Valley Transit, the Fox Cities regional transit system, is in jeopardy. Under federal law, once an urbanized area exceeds a population of 200,000 it no longer qualifies for federal operating assistance. It is estimated that the Fox Cities Urbanized Area reached this threshold in 2006, a fact that will be confirmed with the census in 2010.

For Valley Transit, losing its federal operating assistance means a loss of up to \$1.5 million, or roughly 20% of Valley Transit's annual budget.

In recognition of these facts, in March 2006, Valley Transit and the City of Appleton along with East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, our designated Metropolitan Planning Organization, convened a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority study committee made up of Valley Transit's current funding partners, other local units of government, local non-profit agencies, as well as the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and other business stakeholders to explore the potential benefits of a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority. Over the course of the ensuing two and a half years the study committee has

not only expressed that the RTA concept would be a benefit in terms of planning, operations, and budgeting for Valley Transit, but also as a financial solution to the anticipated loss of federal operating assistance.

The latest meeting of the study committee occurred just last Thursday, April 23, 2009. At this meeting both the Governor's proposal and the Legislative Council proposal were explained in detail and there remained widespread support for legislation creating a Fox Cities RTA.

On behalf of the Fox Cities stakeholders of Valley Transit, I'm asking you today to support the Governor's proposal for the creation of a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority. We understand that the discussion surrounding the creation of a southeast Wisconsin RTA and a Dane County RTA primarily revolves around the issue of commuter rail. But the discussion about the creation of a Fox Cities RTA is about survival. Without the flexibility afforded by a RTA, public transportation in the Fox Cities will cease to exist by 2012.

Since federal operating assistance for transit flows through the State of Wisconsin, if you choose to maintain the status quo and not create a RTA for the Fox Cities, every transit system in Tier II in the State of Wisconsin will see a dramatic decrease in funding by 2012. With property tax levy limits in place for counties and municipalities, these transit systems will look to the State to backfill that loss in federal funding. If the State chooses to hold other transit systems harmless and transfer the loss in federal funding to Valley Transit, you are voting to eliminate Valley Transit as a viable regional public transit provider for the Fox Cities at a time when our constituents are becoming more demanding for economically and environmentally feasible transportation alternatives.

I'm asking you today to do the right thing not only for the Fox Cities, but for the State of Wisconsin. Nationally, Regional Transit Authorities are not a new concept. I wish I could say that supporting RTA's was a progressive idea in keeping with Wisconsin's rich heritage. However, Wisconsin is the only State in the Midwest that does not recognize public transit as a regional issue through enabling legislation supporting Regional Transit Authorities. Supporting RTA's is the right thing to do for the Fox Cities and for the State of Wisconsin.

If you should have any questions regarding Valley Transit or the study committee on the Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



TIMOTHY M. HANNA  
Mayor of Appleton