

Jesse Kremer: Fix our house first: A transportation funding anecdote

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Transportation funding has become a weighty budget discussion, especially over the past several years. Elected officials have a duty to uphold the state and federal constitution while being good stewards of every dime deposited into the state's coffers. As such, elected leaders are obligated to root out inefficiencies and function as the singular voice for those we represent.

Last session, I had the honor of supporting a number of reform minded bills that would have eliminated or mandated a pause on excessive transportation spending. I supported giving local governments more control over the number of unnecessary roundabouts being built, preventing state taxpayer subsidization of Milwaukee's streetcar operations, eliminated the costly and burdensome bike path mandate in road construction. I also supported pausing the installation of closed circuit cameras, overhead digital message boards and manually operated railroad crossing arms at interstate on-ramps.

Unfortunately, most of these recommendations didn't even have the opportunity to receive a vote in the "people's house". This isn't the half of it. During my research over the past few months, I have learned that the taxpayer owned Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been having a detrimental effect on our taxpayer funded transportation system.

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Let me provide an anecdote: A round culvert system under a county highway has been flowing water efficiently for decades. The culvert is deteriorating and must be

replaced. The typical replacement in this type of situation is a rectangular concrete box that allows more water flow than in the past. This box culvert is lowered into the waterway, paved over the top, and is extremely cost effective.

This solution, though, is no longer good enough for Wisconsin rabbits, squirrels and waterways. There are new terms, bankful width and ecopath, that have come into vogue. These terms are exactly what you would expect. DNR officials are measuring the bank of the waterway on either side of the original culvert and not only requiring a box culvert that extends from bank to bank of the actual waterway, but also including a path for our disenfranchised wildlife to walk through. This absurdity has gone so far as to require county employees to shovel gravel onto the bottom of the concrete box to give the appearance of a more natural river bottom.

Benefit to the taxpayers? Zero! Burden to taxpayers? Additional excavation and custom box culvert designs to the tune of thousands to tens of thousands of extra dollars per project.

Yes, we have issues with transportation funding in this state, but this example is barely a ripple in the stream. The real solution does not begin with more revenue from your hard earned tax dollars, but with real leadership from your elected representatives and senators.

— *Kremer, R-Kewaskum, represents the 59th Assembly District.*