

Rep. Schraa: Wheel Tax Referendum Bill

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(Madison, WI) Representative Michael Schraa (R-Oshkosh) is concerned about local transportation funding as well as citizen involvement in the decision-making process. A bill requiring a voter approval for county and local wheel taxes was circulated for co-sponsorship today.

Wisconsin is still recovering from the Doyle era Transportation Fund raids. The Republican majority has repaid the Transportation Fund and protected the fund with a Constitutional Amendment. Even so, the lost opportunity cost is still being felt by taxpayers and road users. "It's just like the roof on your house or the brakes on your car," said Rep. Schraa. "If you wait too long, it needs more repair, and inflation has increased the cost." Counties and local governments can levy a wheel tax to increase their transportation funds, which is an important aspect of local control.

On the other hand, taxpayers have not had a voice in this process. If citizens do not approve of the wheel tax, they can vote out the elected officials, but they are still paying that extra tax.

The wheel tax can be hard on working families—especially those with teen drivers. Drivers are already paying \$75 to register their cars. Imagine living in Milwaukee, where they add \$20 to the registration fee for the city wheel tax, and another \$30 for the county wheel tax. Milwaukee residents are paying \$125 per year for each

vehicle. If there is a spouse who also needs to drive to work, the cost is doubled. Now add in a couple of teenage drivers. A family of four is paying \$500 per year to register vehicles for two adults and two teen drivers.

Most wheel taxes are not as high as Milwaukee's, but there are some additional concerns. The wheel tax is a regressive tax which has a greater impact on the poor than on the wealthy and middle classes. Unlike the property tax, the wheel tax can't even be deducted on income taxes. Government transparency requires a careful examination of all these issues, and the voters should at least have an opportunity to weigh in on this expense.

"Let's keep the option for counties and local governments to raise transportation funds through a wheel tax, and let's also give the people who pay that tax and drive on those roads a say in the decision."