

# Wisconsin Bicycle Federation: Blasts trail killing amendment

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The Wisconsin Bicycle Federation is asking legislators to eliminate a state budget provision that could stop popular recreational trail projects in their tracks.

The measure was slipped into the 19-page omnibus transportation budget amendment passed on a party line vote last week. It would prohibit local jurisdictions and the state Department of Transportation from using condemnation (also known as eminent domain) for the purpose of establishing or extending recreational trails, bicycle ways or lanes or pedestrian ways.

“Joint Finance takes out all the governor’s policy provisions at the beginning of the budget only to slip some of their own back in at the end,” said Bike Fed Executive Director Dave Cieslewicz.

“This provision got no public discussion, no debate and it was passed with no explanation. We don’t even know which legislator wanted it or what caused them to ask for it,” Cieslewicz said.

Cieslewicz said that the Bike Fed has heard from municipalities and others that the prohibition on eminent domain could impact projects all over the state, including Dane County’s Glacial Drumlin Trail Extension, the Madison Cannonball Trail Extension, Janesville’s Northeast Regional Trail Extension, Marshfield’s Wildwood-McMillan Connector Trail and Sheboygan County’s Utility Corridor Multi-Use Path. The national Rails to Trails Conservancy has also expressed concern about the impact this might have on their comprehensive Route of the Badger trail network project in southeast Wisconsin.

The provision also applies to bike lanes and pedestrian ways, so it appears to even prohibit the use of condemnation when a community wants to widen a road and move bike lanes and sidewalks beyond the original right of way.

“Communities around the state are proud of their multi-use trails and they’re being extended and improved all the time,” Cieslewicz said. “Nobody wants to use condemnation and it’s seldom needed, but it’s an important tool in the box to get projects completed. To have a provision like this slipped in to the budget is pretty outrageous.”

The Bike Fed has launched an email campaign asking those on its 14,000 person list to contact their state senators and assembly representatives insisting that they remove this item from the budget. The Rails to Trails Conservancy and the League of American Bicyclists in joining the Bike Fed in the effort.