

WISPIRG: New survey: Wisconsinites call for budget that reflects real transportation needs

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Contact: Peter Skopec, WISPIRG, [\(847\) 687-7229](tel:8476877229) (m)
peter@wispirg.org

Ashwat Narayanan, 1000 Friends, (608) 20259-1000 (o)
ash@1kfriends.org

The state transportation budget doesn't match Wisconsinites' priorities

MADISON – The [results of a new survey](#) highlight how the state's transportation budget priorities are increasingly out of step with Wisconsinites' needs and preferences. The informal survey, conducted by the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation, had over 500 people across the state create their ideal transportation budget, and asked respondents to compare their preferences to the 2015-2017 spending plan.

97 percent of respondents said the last transportation budget did not reflect their values. Respondents called for more funding to meet local needs, like fixing local roads, expanding transit service, or creating more biking and walking options. They also think Wisconsin spends too great a portion of the state budget on major highways.

“There's a lot of debate right now about raising more revenue to pay for our roads, but that risks missing the point of how our tax dollars are being spent,” said Peter Skopec, director at WISPIRG. “Wisconsin's transportation spending choices have clearly left many people behind. This budget is a big opportunity to start shifting towards smarter, more cost-effective investments that better meet current and future needs.”

Over the past two decades, [Wisconsin's transportation budgets have prioritized expanding our state's highway network](#), particularly in Southeast Wisconsin. As revenues declined, this emphasis on building new infrastructure has often come at

the expense of meeting other needs, such as maintaining existing highways, repairing local roads, and providing transit service and specialized transportation that an increasing number of Wisconsinites rely on for mobility and job connectivity. “Transit is vital to my life – it’s my key to independence,” said Kathi Zoern, a member of the interfaith group NAOMI and a disability rights advocate from Wausau. “As someone with a visual impairment, the bus gets me to work, the store, to leisure opportunities. Transportation is a quality of life issue, and transit is a life link for me and many people across the state. Everyone is only one accident, illness, or financial hardship away from needing transit.”

Additionally, local road quality is deteriorating across Wisconsin. According to WISDOT, less than 2.5 percent of Wisconsin’s state highways and interstates are in poor shape, whereas almost 40 percent of our local roads are in poor condition. Recent results of a legislative audit of WISDOT’s state highway program show that this focus on major highways has cost taxpayers billions more than expected. As state leaders debate the future of Wisconsin’s transportation system, advocates and community members encouraged legislators to support community-oriented, forward-thinking solutions that responsibly address the state’s transportation challenges. Specifically, the coalition urges the legislature to rebalance Wisconsin’s spending priorities to better meet local needs by:

- Applying more scrutiny to proposed major highway projects, and not giving the go-ahead to unneeded projects;
- Increasing support for municipal and county governments to help restore local roads to good condition;
- Adjusting specialized transportation funding levels to reflect the needs of those with disabilities and the growing population of seniors who are unable to drive; and
- Restoring previous cuts and increasing transit funding by at least \$34.3 million per year over the next ten years, as recommended by the Governor’s Transportation Finance and Policy Commission in 2013.

“It’s crucial that we maintain existing highways, but we believe the state should rethink how much additional highway capacity is really needed,” concluded Skopec. “As the Governor has pointed out, new technologies – ride-sourcing services like Lyft and Uber, car-sharing, self-driving cars – and changing demographics could have big impacts on car ownership, reducing congestion, transportation preferences, and on where we choose to live in the future. We should consider whether continuing to go all-in on adding highway lanes is really the best choice.” You can see the full survey results [here](#).