

Badger Institute: Wisconsin legislative leaders say tolling necessary for upgrading, maintaining highway system

Posted on Thursday, Feb 7, 2019

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Milwaukee – Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos yesterday advocated for tolling as a long-term solution to the state's transportation funding shortfalls and called for a study that could bring the state one step closer to gaining federal approval for tolling.

During a [roundtable discussion](#) at a Wisconsin Counties Association meeting in Madison, Fitzgerald said he does not see a way for the state to address its infrastructure challenges without some form of open-road tolling. He also noted that tolls could generate billions instead of millions of dollars for highway improvements, adding that even a significant increase in the gas tax would fall short of fixing Wisconsin highways.

[Analysis from the Badger Institute](#) over the years confirms that tolling on interstate highways is a workable approach for rebuilding and widening the state's aging Interstate system. It is, in fact, "the [only realistic, long-term solution](#) to Wisconsin's road funding dilemma," according to Robert Poole Jr., author of [Rebuilding and Modernizing Wisconsin's Interstates with Toll Financing](#), and Mike Nichols, president of the Badger Institute.

As vehicles become more energy efficient, revenue from gas taxes will slowly

decline in coming years.

Borrowing is unsustainable, too. More than 20 percent of all Wisconsin transportation fund revenues already go toward debt service instead of improving our roads. The state spends over a half-billion dollars every year just servicing transportation-related debt.

In a recent [Badger Institute commentary](#), Poole reported that two major studies released late last year strengthen the case for Wisconsin to pursue tolling and validate the need for a Phase 2 interstate tolling study. Funding for such a study was vetoed by Gov. Scott Walker in the last state budget.

A Phase 2 study would allow the state to determine what it would cost to rebuild and widen the state's aging interstates.

Such a study, he added, could identify "the best ways to ensure that the tolling is done in a customer-friendly way — for example, by offering rebates for fuel taxes on the newly tolled corridors. It also could recommend ways to make the cost of electronic toll collection as low as possible, compared with the high cost of old-fashioned cash tolling. And it could assess value-added features for trucking companies, such as lots of safe overnight parking spaces with various other services, including electric vehicle recharging and alternative fuel sources."

Modern, all-electronic tolling lets people who use the roads pay for them and provides a fair, quick and convenient way to create a highway system that grows the state economy and allows Wisconsin drivers to reach their destinations safely.

"Wisconsin," according to Poole, "can pioneer 21st century Interstates, becoming a model for all the other states."