

Vos, Fitz talk override of Evers transpo veto over Milwaukee streetcar

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The Legislature's top GOP leaders today talked up a possible override of a Gov. Tony Evers veto that left \$75 million in GPR for transportation projects over concerns that some of the money could help Milwaukee's streetcar.

But GOP Sen. Howard Marklein downplayed those concerns, saying the proposal the Evers administration released today to divvy up the money will ensure money intended for rural communities in his district won't go to the streetcar.

DOT Secretary Craig Thompson today announced the administration will create a committee that includes agency staff and representatives of local government to evaluate applications for the \$75 million. Those proposals that would also boost economic development will be given preference, though Thompson also pledged there will be geographic balance in how the projects are picked.

The state budget Republican lawmakers approved included \$90 million in GPR in supplemental funding for local road projects. It also included a provision that directed \$35.1 million to towns, \$32 million to counties, and about \$22.8 million to villages and cities.

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Evers reduced that pot of money to \$75 million, and he nixed the Legislature's directive on how to split it up.

Thompson said possible uses of the money now could include transit, whereas Republicans directed the money to road work.

Still, Thompson said the administration's plan will include a similar ratio as the budget. Towns will split up \$29.2 million of the money with \$26.7 million set aside for counties, and \$19 million for cities and villages.

Under the administration's approach, the grants would cover up to 90 percent of a project's cost with the local government covering the rest. The projects would also have to be completed within six years.

Thompson said the city of Milwaukee could submit an application for funding its streetcar. If it scored well with the committee, it is possible some of the money set aside for cities and villages would go to the project.

Following the announcement, Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, tweeted, "The governor is taking money from local road construction to fund Milwaukee's trolley to nowhere. Rural Dems should push back - veto override!"

A Fitzgerald aide said any discussion an override would wait until the fall.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, later tweeted his chamber was "seriously" considering an override as well, calling the possibility money would benefit the streetcar "ridiculous."

"We need the dollars to fix roads and bridges not fund the streetcar fantasies of liberals like Mayor Barrett," Vos tweeted.

Marklein, R-Spring Green and a member of the Joint Finance Committee, said in a statement "local towns will not be paying for Milwaukee's trolley," though he planned to keep watch to ensure rural areas don't lose out to their urban counterparts.

He said in a separate interview he wasn't concerned that some of the money may go to transit projects, unlike under the GOP plan, so long as funding for rural communities was protected.

Thompson said he expected almost all of the \$29.2 million for towns to go to road work.

"I want to make sure whatever structure that the DOT comes up with is fair and doesn't put my poorest counties and poorest townships at a disadvantage," said Marklein, who joined nine GOP Senate colleagues yesterday in a letter to Thompson

urging him to follow the Legislature's intent with the money.