

# WisDOT Secretary: Now is the time to invest in our roads, economy and future

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Addressing our growing transportation needs has become a hotly-debated topic at the state and national levels. In Wisconsin, Governor Tony Evers' proposed transportation budget offers a responsible and urgently-needed path forward to address an issue that has been studied, debated, avoided and delayed for well over a decade.

One issue that's no longer open for debate is the overall decline in pavement conditions. Anyone who analyzes pavement condition reports or regularly drives Wisconsin roads will come to the same unavoidable conclusion: pavement conditions across our state are worsening. And without prompt action, we can expect that trend to continue.

Finding consensus on a long-term transportation funding solution has proven elusive, sending policymakers down an ill-advised path of least resistance: borrowing. Currently, close to 20 percent of Wisconsin's transportation revenues are used to pay off debt service (compared to about 10 percent in 2006). While bonding has a role in funding larger, long-term projects, it is clearly on an unsustainable trajectory in Wisconsin.

In response to these challenges, Governor Evers has provided a comprehensive

strategy to break this decade-long impasse. Many of these same concepts were unanimously endorsed by the state's bi-partisan Transportation Finance and Policy Commission established under Governor Walker back in 2011. Key components of Governor Evers' transportation budget:

- an 8-cent increase in the state motor fuel tax costing the average Wisconsin driver \$3.30 per month (comparable to a Mocha Frappuccino at a popular coffee venue)
- restarting gas tax indexing to keep pace with inflation
- increasing heavy truck fees, original and transfer title fees

In return, Wisconsin can finally begin making long-overdue investments in its multi-modal transportation system with an emphasis on preserving existing infrastructure in every part of the state:

- \$320 million increase for state highway rehabilitation
- \$66 million increase in general transportation aids to ease pressure on municipalities
- finishing work on the Zoo Interchange, Wisconsin's largest, most economically-vital interchange
- investments in public transit, elderly and disabled transportation services, freight and passenger rail, airports and harbors

For many decades, motor fuel taxes have functioned adequately as a user fee to support transportation needs – and they remain a viable funding source into the foreseeable future. Most importantly, the time to act is now. Adjusting the motor fuel tax involves no administrative or infrastructure costs and can be implemented promptly to address our pressing needs.

Since 2013, 30 states have agreed on funding plans to support needed investments in transportation services and infrastructure. In each of those states – red and blue – this involved adjusting motor fuel taxes. Under Governor Evers' leadership and with a willingness from state policymakers, Wisconsin is finally positioned to make a similar investment in our state's transportation network that will support public safety and mobility, economic growth and our quality of life.

**Craig Thompson**

**Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary-designee**