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Transportation advocates applaud climate recommendations but urge rejection of I-94 highway expansion

Groups call on state leaders to invest in high-quality public transit options, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and the transition to electric vehicles

MADISON — Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes released the [Governor's Task Force on Climate Change Report](#) on Wednesday, which presents 55 recommendations for reducing global warming emissions and mitigating climate impacts on Wisconsin communities and the environment. The report lays out an agenda to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. Wisconsin's transportation system is the second-greatest source of carbon emissions in the state. To address these emissions, the Task Force focuses on promoting public transit, complete streets and electric vehicles through increased investment and regional planning efforts.

The plan also directs WisDOT to perform climate and environmental justice impact analyses on transportation-related projects. Interstate-94's expansion in Milwaukee would have major racial and environmental justice impacts. Members of the coalition opposed the I-94 East-West expansion and are calling on the administration to develop a plan to rebuild I-94 without adding lanes. Instead, the money saved should be used to promote walking, biking and transit in Wisconsin.

Members of the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation issued the following statements in response:

"The recommendations coming out of this report are a good first step toward addressing Wisconsin's transportation emissions," **said Deb Nemeth, executive director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.** "We applaud the focus on public transit, walking and biking infrastructure, and we are especially pleased to see the role of reducing vehicles miles traveled (VMT) explicitly mentioned. However, there are many barriers to making our transportation system safer, cleaner and more equitable. If the governor continues to pursue Interstate-94's expansion in Milwaukee, it will run counter to the goals and aspirations of their own report. Wisconsin needs to start building a more sustainable, less carbon-intensive, transportation system now."

"As an interfaith congregation-based justice organization, MICAHI has pledged to look at each issue we address through the lens of racial justice," **said Pastor Joseph Jackson, president of Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAHI).** "We have consistently raised the inequity that the development and expansion of I-94 has meant for communities of poverty and color along its route. Where are the needs of those without automobiles and others who are transit dependent being

addressed? These lives matter! They are being impacted unjustly and it is extremely important that they are valued as planning moves ahead. The dollars that are being proposed for the current I-94 development are being stolen from meeting the needs of those whose communities will be most devastated by it."

"It is important that WisDOT's environmental justice analysis not only looks at issues affecting communities of color, but also includes concrete steps to mitigate that harm," **said Karyn L. Rotker, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation.** "Here, the history, and harm, has for many years included continuing to build, improve and expand highways while letting transit languish. That cannot continue."

"The omission of the impact of highway expansions on climate, public health and social justice in our state's climate plan is a significant missed opportunity," **said Elizabeth Ward, chapter director for the statewide branch of Sierra Club.** "We look forward to supporting walking, biking, public transportation and electric vehicles, and we will continue to advocate against costly and polluting highway expansion projects like I-94. Highway expansions are in conflict with any goal to address climate change and racial justice."

"Transportation is now America's number one source of global warming pollution, and we simply can't solve global warming without changing how we get around," **said Megan Severson, state director for Wisconsin Environment.** "The challenge is critical, and we're glad the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change Report incorporates transportation solutions, from electrifying our cars and buses to reducing the need to drive by making it easier, cheaper and more enjoyable to travel on foot, bike or public transit."

"We're grateful that the report focuses on public transit, complete streets and electric vehicles," **said Matt Casale, environment campaigns director for WISPIRG.** "But to truly tackle the problem, we have to end our over-dependence on car-centered infrastructure -- including scrapping the I-94 expansion. If we're smart about how we spend our transportation dollars and focus on modern, 21st-century transportation improvements, we can build a Wisconsin with less pollution, less gridlock and more public and active transit."

"Expanding I-94 would worsen racial injustice as members of low-income and minority communities often [lack reliable transportation options](#), so they rarely benefit from billion-dollar road projects like this one," **said David Liners, state director for WISDOM.** "In fact, Wisconsin's decades-long focus on building and expanding major highways has actively harmed members of these communities by worsening racial and economic segregation, especially in the Milwaukee region. Not only are highways physical barriers that segregate communities, but they also increase air pollution in the surrounding neighborhoods — which are most often communities of color. [In 2014](#), the federal government found that the Zoo Interchange construction and expansion in Milwaukee caused 'irreparable harm' to minority communities. This I-94 expansion project, on the same corridor, is no different."