

WISPIRG

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For Additional Information:

Susanna Cain, Transform Transportation Associate, susanna@wispirg.org, 630-418-1806

John Stout, U.S. PIRG Transportation Advocate, jstout@pirg.org, 857 285-3605

Taran Volckhausen, Communications Associate, tvolckhausen@publicinterestnetwork.org, 720-212-9955

New report proposes roadmap for how to transform Wisconsin's transportation infrastructure

Years of car-dependence have exacerbated serious health conditions for Wisconsinites -- but advocates have a plan to make transportation cleaner and safer.

MADISON -- Wisconsin's current transportation system has been designed, built and centered around the automobile, and it is a public health disaster. WISPIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group's latest report, [Transform Transportation](#), identifies the numerous harmful health impacts caused by Wisconsin's car-centric transportation system and provides a three-step roadmap toward a healthier, more sustainable approach to transportation infrastructure.

Year after year, Wisconsin legislators misplace transportation funding by spending [billions of dollars' on new and expanded highways](#), like Milwaukee's recently proposed I-94 widening project. Funding for public transit or walking and biking infrastructure remains underfunded and Wisconsinites' transportation needs aren't being met. Meanwhile, [approximately 550 people die in vehicle crashes in Wisconsin annually](#), and [several thousand more are left severely injured](#). Pollution from cars, trucks and other vehicles cuts short an estimated [16,000 lives nationwide each year](#). [Americans drive more than 3.2 trillion miles](#) – nearly 10,000 miles per person and more miles per capita than people almost anywhere else in the world.

“Our current transportation system is wreaking havoc on our health and the health of our planet,” said WISPIRG Transform Transportation Associate Susanna Cain. “Decades of car-centered investment strategies have left us with inefficient and dangerous transportation infrastructure.”

Some of the worst impacts of Wisconsin's car-centric transportation documented in the *Transform Transportation* report are:

- **Pollution:** Air and noise pollution have been shown to increase the risk of serious health conditions, including [lung cancer, stroke, heart disease, asthma and dementia](#).

- **Traffic-related fatalities:** In 2018, [over 500 Wisconsinites were killed in traffic-related accidents](#), with traffic fatalities increasing in 2020 despite fewer cars on the road. [Milwaukee experienced a 50% increase in fatalities this past year](#).
- **Poor quality of life:** People with long car commutes are at increased risk of [diabetes](#), [cardiovascular disease](#), [osteoporosis](#), [high blood pressure](#) and experience substantially higher levels of stress, including more negative moods and lower life satisfaction.
- **Climate change:** Wisconsin's transportation system is [projected to become the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions](#) in the state and is the largest single contributor to the climate crisis.

Despite causing tremendous havoc and suffering, COVID-19 may have also provided an unexpected opportunity for Wisconsinites to reassess their transportation habits. As lockdowns kicked in across the country, a [record decline in driving](#) has been accompanied by an increase in people walking, cycling and choosing other active modes of transportation.

The environmental impacts of this decline in driving were evident almost immediately. By mid-April, at the height of lockdown, [daily carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. were down by around one-third](#). Without realizing it, Americans had embarked on a transportation experiment on a previously inconceivable scale.

“Almost half of the global drop in emissions during the pandemic was attributable to the decline in road traffic alone. As we emerge from the pandemic, we have choices to make. With the right policies, we can deliver huge benefits for public health and the environment by making it easier and safer for Americans to drive less and live more,” said report co-author James Horrox of Frontier Group.

The new report provides numerous recommendations designed to transform Wisconsin's transportation system in the long term. Among these are to:

- **Double the number of people who travel by foot, bike or transit by 2030** by expanding transit networks and creating “complete streets” that are safe, accessible and support micro-mobility.
- **Electrify all transit and school buses by 2030** by adopting commitments for zero-emission electric buses from transit agencies, school districts and utility companies.
- **Make all new light-duty cars and trucks sold after 2035 electric and all new medium- and heavy-duty trucks sold by 2040 electric** by incentivizing the adoption of electric vehicles through expanded charging infrastructure and by reducing financial hurdles.

“Our country's transportation system makes us sick and unhappy, and threatens our kids' future,” said U.S. PIRG Transportation Advocate and report co-author John Stout. “As infrastructure takes center stage at the national level, let's take the opportunity to imagine the cities and towns of the future, and build them the way we want to be -- by transforming transportation.”

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