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**Statement: Proposed state transportation budget will unnecessarily expand I-94
and leave transit riders in the dust**

Transportation advocates call for more action before the budget heads to Gov. Evers' desk

The Joint Finance Committee [voted Tuesday night](#) to move forward on transportation components of Wisconsin's 2021-23 biennial budget. These elements include investments in Wisconsin's local road and bridge repair, but the committee rejected Gov. Tony Evers' proposals to increase public transit funding and invest in electric vehicle charging. Instead, the Joint Finance Committee voted to reduce transit funding in Madison and Milwaukee by 50 percent over the next two years. The committee also voted to fund the proposed \$1.1 billion I-94 highway expansion in Milwaukee.

Organizations from the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation issued the following statements:

"We are disappointed to see the Joint Finance Committee fund the I-94 highway expansion and significantly reduce the governor's initially proposed investment in public transportation, which would have done even more to create a cleaner, more effective transportation system that our state needs," said **Megan Severson, State Director for Wisconsin Environment**. "Our current, car-centric approach is wreaking havoc on both our health and the health of our planet. Funding the \$1.1 billion I-94 highway boondoggle in Milwaukee takes us in the wrong direction. We need to transform our transportation system now so that it's safer, cleaner, more affordable and better suited to our 21st century needs as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic."

"If the Joint Finance Committee's decision becomes a reality, it will have devastating impacts," said **Gregg May, Transportation Policy Director at 1000 Friends of Wisconsin**. "These deep transit cuts are being billed as a one-time reduction, but make no mistake, they will have long-term consequences for our transit systems in Madison and Milwaukee. Riders already struggling with service cuts will now see many routes disappear, dramatically reducing their ability to access employment, healthcare and basic goods. With Wisconsin's limited transportation funds, we should be fixing local roads and supporting our struggling transit systems instead of funding an unnecessary billion dollar highway expansion."

"The Joint Finance Committee's passed motion is inexcusable. Funding a highway expansion project that is yet to undergo review or solicit public input is an uneconomic, irresponsible decision. This project as

currently proposed will not address the congestion or safety concerns, and it will negatively impact air quality, surrounding neighborhoods and the climate,” said **Cassie Steiner, Senior Campaign Coordinator at Sierra Club Wisconsin**. “Adding insult to injury, the committee also made drastic cuts to Madison and Milwaukee’s public transit funding. Public transportation serves as a vital connector for those who do not want to drive, cannot drive and cannot afford a car. This proposal is a step backwards in sensible transportation policy that meets the needs of Wisconsinites.”

“The decisions from Joint Finance for drastic transit cuts for Milwaukee and Madison, the two largest cities in Wisconsin, are unjust and unacceptable,” said **Reverend Joseph Jackson, Jr., President of Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)**.

“The Joint Finance Committee’s recommendation to slash transit funding in Milwaukee by 50% and fully fund a \$1 billion, unnecessary highway expansion of I-94 (from 16th to 70th Streets) is contrary to public opinion, damaging to the climate, and exposes our communities and environment to increased air and water pollution,” said **Cheryl Nenn, Riverkeeper with Milwaukee Riverkeeper**. “We should be working toward a greener, healthier, and more climate resilient future; this JFC budget takes us backwards.”

“In Wisconsin, and especially urban areas like Milwaukee, people of color and people with disabilities disproportionately rely on public transportation to get to work, school, shops and hospitals, so these proposed transit cuts – especially when coupled with yet another massive highway project - are not only wrongheaded but discriminatory,” said **Karyn Rotker, Senior Staff Attorney with ACLU of Wisconsin**. “We should be expanding access to public transportation, not restricting it.”

“The Interfaith Earth Network encourages care for people and care for the planet. This decision fails on both measures,” said **Terry Wiggins, steering committee member with Interfaith Earth Network**. “It does not take care of the many people who are car-less, who are unable to drive, or who choose not to drive. Expansion of I-94 will increase greenhouse gas emissions, to the detriment of our climate, and, in the long run, will not solve congestion issues. The funds could be used for purposes that would benefit far more people as well as the planet, such as rebuilding and repairing I-94 without expanding it, or building high-speed rail, or repairing local roads.”

"Milwaukee needs better public transit, not bigger highways," said **Tony Wilkin Gibart, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates**. "The I-94 highway expansion project has not yet been thoroughly reviewed, updated to reflect recent data, or subject to meaningful public input. This proposal would increase our dependence on cars, add to greenhouse gas emissions, disproportionately hurt Milwaukeeans of color and cause significant harm to surrounding neighborhoods. We are disappointed that Legislative Republicans are stuck in the spending patterns of last century."

“As long-time public transit advocates we have been sharing with legislators the impact that insufficient public transit funding has had on people's lives,” said **Connie Kanitz, chair of ESTHER transportation task force of Fox Cities**. “For years we have hoped our representatives would finally understand the importance of each resident being able to find a viable option to get to destinations. A Harvard study identified transit access as the number one factor in escaping poverty. Many aging seniors and millenials

are not finding their needs met either. We have shared our vision of how public transportation can enhance the quality of all of our lives. But once again in this year's Joint Finance Committee state budget, we are met with drastic transit cuts and another highway expansion."

"Any wise investor knows that a diversified portfolio is the best strategy to ensure that investments are balanced against unpredictable future risks. Instead of heeding this common sense investment strategy, the legislature has decided to double down on a narrow minded focus of highway funding and ruthless attack on the state's population who depend on transit," said **Nick DeMarsh, President of the Wisconsin Transit Riders Alliance**. "This heartless and thoughtless proposal only seeks to create more gridlock, more inequality, leaving our future generations further in debt and more pavement to maintain. This is a missed opportunity to invest in a diversified transportation portfolio that gives Wisconsin residents a real choice about how to move across the state."

"It's clear, with this latest decision, that Wisconsin still has a misplaced appetite for costly, polluting and ineffective highway expansion projects," said **Susanna Cain, Transportation Associate for WISPIRG**. "COVID-19 has highlighted how stark our transportation needs truly are, especially for essential workers and low-income households without access to a car. Rather than costly highway boondoggles, we need to start using our money more wisely by investing in public transit, walking and biking."

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