



**TRANSPORTATION
STAKEHOLDER
TASK FORCE**

Summary
February 2020



TRANSPORTATION STAKEHOLDER TASK FORCE SUMMARY

In January 2019, Governor Tony Evers directed Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) Secretary, Craig Thompson, to form the Transportation Stakeholder Task Force (TSTF). The Task Force's focus is to propose bipartisan policy solutions for consideration in current and future budgets. Members include partners from across the state, all economic sectors, and transportation system users.

The Task Force gathered over two days—January 31st in Madison, and February 4th in La Crosse.

WisDOT staff presented information focused on two primary areas—Wisconsin's transportation finance and the state's transportation programs. Each participant provided a unique perspective on how Wisconsin's transportation system needs impact their group or industry.

Throughout the two days, several common themes emerged:

- Wisconsin must move from maintaining an old and inadequate transportation system to building one that will meet 21st century needs.
- Wisconsin's solution must be forward thinking when addressing transportation system needs. We must build to what we need for the future, not to what we have today.
- A strong transportation system is critical to a strong economy.
- Wisconsin needs leadership and we need decisions. The time for action is now.
- Solutions must be equitable, sustainable, and create consistency. In addition, they must be balanced, multimodal and unified.
- Collaboration and coordination are essential to address the state's transportation system needs.
- Transportation funding is insufficient to meet system needs. Any solution must address transportation revenue. Without a revenue solution, we cannot tackle funding modal needs.



- Transportation funding has not consistently addressed increased costs of construction.
- In addition to addressing short-term needs, we must have a long-term plan to address transportation funding and system needs.
- In terms of revenue generator options, the gas tax was identified as the most preferred.

Secretary-designee Thompson closed the discussion. He thanked the members for sharing their time and expertise over the two days. He further noted that this was a tremendous start to a challenging discussion. The issues and recommendations identified over the two days would be used to inform the department's 2019–2021 budget submittal to the Governor. He closed by noting that the ideas and recommendations discussed during the meetings would also help the department and the state define a longer-term path moving forward.

The Task Force discussions and feedback formed the basis for several of WisDOT's biennial budget recommendations, that were later passed as part of the 2019–2021 Biennial Budget (2019 Wisconsin Act 9).



Task Force Members

Communities

Jonathan Delagrave, County Executive Racine County
Jerry Deshane, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Donna Brown-Martin, Milwaukee County of Transportation
Dan Fedderly, Wisconsin County Highway Association
Sheldon Johnson, Northwest Regional Planning Commission
Tim Hanna, City of Appleton
Jeremy Weso, Menominee
Mike Koles, Wisconsin Towns Association
Rep. Debra Kolste, Assembly Committee on Transportation
Mark O'Connell, Wisconsin Counties Association
Curt Witynski, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Rep. Bob Kulp, Assembly Committee on Transportation
Sen. Dave Hansen, Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans and Military Affairs
Sen. Jerry Petrowski, Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans and Military Affairs
Sen. Howard Marklein, Senate Committee on Transportation, Veterans and Military Affairs

Road users

Andrew Davis, Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
Jim Holte, Wisconsin Farm Bureau
Tracy Johnson, Commercial Association of Realtors Wisconsin
Jeff Knight, Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions
Steve Rohde, Schneider Trucking
Henry Schienebeck, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
Tom Bressner, Wisconsin Agribusiness Association

Multimodal advocates

Carrie Diamond, Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.
Ken Lucht, Wisconsin & Southern Railroad
Ashwat Narayanan, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin
John Parkyn, Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers
Lisa Pugh, The Arc Wisconsin
Dave Schlabowske, Wisconsin Bike Fed
Abe Weber, Wisconsin Airport Managers Association
Dean Haen, Wisconsin Commercial Ports Association

Contractors and engineering consultants

Rob Kahl, Construction Business Group
Chris Klein, American Council of Engineering Companies



John Schmitt, Wisconsin Laborers District Council

2019 Wisconsin Act 9 signed July 3, 2019

- Provides \$7.2 billion for the biennium
- An estimated \$390 million in revenue increases
 - Title Fees increase \$95; generating an estimated \$158 million per year
 - Vehicle Registration Fee increase \$10 generating an estimated \$37 million per year
 - Registration Fee changes for light trucks; generating an estimated \$14.8 million per year
 - Statutory changes allow collection of the \$75 hybrid-electric vehicle fee, which was approved in the last budget
 - Reduces fuel suppliers' administrative allowance
 - Eliminates retailer refunds for evaporation
- Reduced bonding
 - \$326 million in new bonding, the lowest level in years:
 - 67% lower than 2013–2015 levels
 - 60% lower than 2015–2017 levels
 - 19% lower than 2017–2019 levels
- Highway programs
 - State Highway Rehabilitation Program—\$1.9 billion in total funding, a 19 percent increase over the base funding from the prior biennium.



- For the Major Highway Program—\$564.2 million in total funding and enumerated the following projects:
 - I-43 between Silver Spring Drive and WIS 60 in Milwaukee and Ozaukee counties;
 - I-41 between WIS 96 and County F in Brown and Outagamie counties.
- Funding to complete the Zoo Interchange and the St. Croix Crossing
- Allow Design-Build delivery for state highway improvement projects
- Local programs
 - 10 percent increase for General Transportation Aids and a supplement for towns
 - A one-time \$75 million discretionary program for multi modal local transportation projects
- Transit programs
 - 2 percent increase for Mass Transit Operating Aids
 - 10 percent increase for paratransit service aids
 - Increases for senior and disabled transportation aids, tribal elderly transportation grants, and transportation employment and mobility
- Multimodal programs
 - \$45.2 million for Harbors
 - \$35 million for Passenger Rail
 - \$30 million for Freight Rail
 - Approximately \$1 million per year for Aeronautics to support next generation air traffic control



Report Summary—Appendix

Task Force Roundtable Discussion

Each member was asked to provide their final thoughts on the outcomes of the two days and share any remaining recommendations or thoughts for consideration moving forward. The following is a summary of comments made by Task Force members:

Communities

“For the state to be successful, for us to move forward, for Wisconsin to be positioned for future success, we need an incredibly strong private sector. One of the critical elements of a strong private sector is a strong infrastructure. It’s been said here today that that infrastructure needs resources. It’s been underfunded for quite some time. We have a very diverse group of people here that have come to the same conclusion, one by one and then in small groups. I do want to congratulate and thank the department, you clearly have an incredibly talented staff and if I dare say the best leadership we could possibly have. Secretary Thompson thanks for bringing together this diverse group of people together to discuss this, which is really the future of our state.”

“I don’t think I need to advocate for additional transportation financing for all the modes. That’s been the focus of the conversation today and last Thursday and that there is not one specific mode that took precedence over another one. It was all of us talking about all the modes and that is an important thing. The state highways that we drive on every day, that I’m going to drive on all the way home, are important. They’re rural. The citizens of Wisconsin understand there’s need for transportation improvements, they’re the ones that are going to have to pay for it. I think it’s important for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to tell them what they’re going to get out of that penny or dime or whatever that is that’s going to benefit their county, their region. Because if they don’t see it, they’re not going to buy into it.”

“What I’d like to leave you with is a call for leadership. We’ve had enough studies, we’ve looked at them all. We’ve seen enough polls, we’ve looked at them all. We’ve had enough elections. There’s not a solution that everyone in Wisconsin is going to love, but we need a solution. I know you Craig, and I think Governor Evers, the legislators, you and your colleagues are going to have to do the tough job. You’re going to have to vote for a package that not everybody’s going to love.”



“Number one we have a short-term issue that we need to take care of. Everyone has talked about revenue. My encouragement would be to look at transportation as a unified system, rather than silos. We fund it as silos, we talk about it as silos. Number two, I say fund the system you want, not the system you have. Meaning think about the future, think about how transportation is changing, think about how demographics are changing, think about what we want the state to look like, and start funding that rather than throwing money into the system we have today. Outside forces are going to change, and will force us to change the system we have. Let’s be smart about it, and think about the future and what’s happening: where Millennials are going; business needs; our work force; and where people are going to live and what kind of choices they want to make. Let’s give them the choices they want, rather than just the ones that they have.”

“I would like the Secretary and the Governor to consider the financial hardships the smaller counties have with satisfying cost sharing requirements and overcoming application barriers.”

“We just can’t keep increasing debt and allowing the next generation and future generations to pay for more debt and then less for transportation projects—whatever those projects might be. Need to have a forward vision in incorporating smart community /smart county aspects to transportation funding in projects.”

“I am sorry I missed the first day. Today was wonderful day. The diversity of opinion was varied, and the congeniality was amazing.”

“This was a good two days. At the end of the day we can discuss all the functions, but none of it matters if we don’t address revenue. Each of us has a legitimate argument to call to address specific transportation needs, but none of it matters if we don’t address the revenue need. If you look at the numbers for construction inflation (presented during the Highways presentation) and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau’s paper #35—you combine those two trains of thought with regard to adjusting revenue streams just to get back to 2006 when we took away indexing.”

“There appears to be a universal acceptance of the need for increased revenues to address transportation. All modes of transportation in Wisconsin are clearly important. The Department’s ability to balance those needs is critical to how we move forward.”



Road users

“Understanding that there’s no one single silver bullet that is going to solve our problem we’ll support a solution that is sustainable, equitable, and consistent for our members and the people that they employ in SE WI area.”

“We agree that there has to be some revenue put into the stream. But, we also want to see changes to way things are getting done. More and more we’re seeing rural roads getting weight limited and Class B’s being put out there. This makes it impossible for us to manage our natural resources which need to be managed. We’re doing a terrific job in Wisconsin with natural resources. The record speaks for itself. We’re more than willing to put some money in, we have members who put a lot of money in rural roads in the form of gravel and grading just to be able to use those roads. We look forward to working with the rest of you and I appreciate having our industry included in the conversation. It’s always a debate whether forest products or agriculture is the number one industry in the state. We just want to work to get the right thing done here.”

“Clearly there’s a need for revenue. The challenge will be to balance where it goes. Kicking the can down the road by borrowing money is not an alternative. The discussion needs to return to a rational level.”

“I am impressed with how everybody came to the table with their own interests, but that many of these recommendations put that aside. Impressive—we followed direction. From the commercial realty perspective, an emphasis on the importance of infrastructure to support economic development and building communities is needed.”

“I’m in absolute agreement. Revenue, revenue, revenue. There’s a lot of projects that need to get done. But, unless we put some revenue in the system, we’re not going to get anywhere. Tourism has been on board with addressing the revenue short-fall for a long time. We would just like to suggest you need to be careful with tolling, because everyone in our industry is afraid of what that impact will do if we rush and it’s not well thought out.”

“We will support a modest increase in the gas tax. We oppose tolling. The most important thing is that the decisions be equitable. Equality is very important to us.”



Multimodal advocates

“I really appreciate the opportunity to have these cross-sector conversations. We are so often honed into our own issues and our own priorities that we forget that the whole transportation system—whether it’s for people who drive or don’t drive—is important to the state of Wisconsin’s economic development and work force, and impacts a lot of people in a lot of different ways. A lot of older adults use the roads, they’re really important. The second highest mode is walking—so the bikeways and walkways are really important, as well as having alternatives when people no longer drive. I agree that we need revenue, when we look at things that tend to be regressive for revenue, we should ensure that we have investments for people who are impacted by regressive tax, that they will have options, meaning that they will have affordable options.”

“We are in favor of a balanced transportation system. Not just roads, also bikes, pedestrians, and harbors. Freight rail is a vital part of the rail system in Wisconsin, there needs to be support for additional funding for freight rail.”

“Our members are willing to pay a little bit more if it goes to riding bikes. I think everybody here has said that. Once again, it’s a revenue, revenue, revenue thing. We can’t cut our way to transportation sustainability anymore, we need to find new money.”

“It’s interesting to learn a little glimpse of all the issues that everyone deals with. From the airport’s perspective, our goal is to be more competitive on the federal landscape try to grab some of that federal dollars and bring them back to our state. It’s out there—we need to go compete for it and bring that dollar back to Wisconsin.”

“Single issue is to try to restore a second train from Chicago to Milwaukee and to the Twin Cities. It touches the issue of air emissions, certainly, but it also gets people off roads, and it’s a way for non-drivers to get places.”

“It’s good to hear a movement towards rebalancing priorities that can impact non-drivers including people with disabilities who want to work but for whom transportation is a limiting barrier.”

“I want to reiterate that there are many people in the state of Wisconsin who are not able to drive or don’t want to drive and are stuck without options and can’t get to work. We need to make sure we build a 21st century system that works for everybody in Wisconsin, including a many of us who aren’t represented at the table here.”



Transportation is the fastest and largest growing segment of carbon emissions. Climate change is a global threat and getting to a clean transportation system is imperative for us to get to a system that works for everyone.

Contractors and engineering consultants

“As engineers we work with data and facts. And after two days the data has shown that it is a fact that we have a revenue problem and we just hope that we’re finally able to address that.”

“I look at these dots and it’s all the same stuff. I echo what others have said—it’s all about the money. We know there are needs and they are multi-modal needs. But until there’s the will to do the right thing, which is actually the conservative thing—pay as you go and stop running up the credit card—we’re going to be back here six years from now discussing the same issues. I do appreciate the work the staff put in, both when we did this before and this time, it makes the job serving on committees like this a lot easier when you get a lot of good information.”

“Thanks for the effort. Revenue—we’ve been talking about this for how many years? And I look at all the green dots right there about what we need to do. We need to do something with gas tax indexing and a few other revenue options—that’s just the top to get where we want to get.”