



The Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin is a statewide nonprofit organization that advocates building and maintaining an efficient, reliable and interconnected transportation system that addresses our state's needs for safe mobility and economic growth.

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Economic Recovery is Priority One

Congress is back in session and the federal stimulus plan is beginning to take shape. Democratic leaders and President-elect Obama talk of a package of approximately \$775 billion, with approximately 40% going to tax cuts. Increased infrastructure investment continues to be discussed as a component of the package, but no details have been released.

In December, Governor Doyle released a list of potential infrastructure projects – including \$631 million in transportation projects – that could get underway within 120 days of the federal government approving the stimulus package. Visit www.tdawisconsin.org for the details.

This economic recovery bill is no longer expected to be ready for President-elect Obama's

signature on the day he takes office. While it is a top priority for Democratic leaders, a bill of this magnitude is likely to take some time. In a recent press conference, President-elect Obama urged Congress to act now, warning that the United States risks sinking deeper into an economic crisis without an infusion of government spending and a cut in tax rates.

At the state level, Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker, D-Weston, says passing a state economic stimulus package that emphasizes building roads and bridges and creating jobs will be his first priority. According to Decker, the state plan would correspond with a federal stimulus package. No details of a state stimulus plan have been made public.

Executive Perspective

By Craig Thompson, TDA Executive Director

Finding the Will and the Way

Where there's a will, there's a way? If the old saying holds true, perhaps we will look back at 2008 as the year that policymakers began to develop the will to address the nation's – and Wisconsin's – threatened transportation infrastructure.

A Quick Review

In January of 2008, the National Surface Transportation and Revenue Study Commission, a federal commission appointed by Congress to study transportation finances, issued some significant recommendations. The 12-member commission pointed out that the country has fallen dangerously behind in modernizing, replacing and repairing our aging infrastructure, and called for a renewed vision for transportation in the United States that focuses on results. The commission suggested the following changes to transportation funding:

- Instituting an annual increase in the federal gas tax – from five to eight cents per year for five years – and a subsequent indexing of the gas tax to inflation.
- Encouraging states to increase their gas taxes AND their use of tolls and fees for rush-hour traveling.
- Proposing a national transition in transportation funding over the course of the next 15 years as a way to move from the gas tax to a vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) means of transportation funding.

Predictably, the commission's report and recommendations elicited a cool response from elected officials.

However, as debates over transportation policy and funding continued in Wisconsin and nationwide throughout 2008, some end-of-

the-year developments revealed an increasing determination to find a way to solve our myriad transportation problems:

- In November, President-elect Obama called for "the largest new investment in our national infrastructure since the creation of the federal highway system in the 1950s." Now, the president-elect wants this economic stimulus package to be the first bill he signs as president.
- Also in November, Governor Doyle indicated at a press conference on the state budget that he would propose enabling legislation for Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) across the state.
- Then, on December 30th, Governor Doyle suggested that Wisconsin consider returning to gas tax indexing. "I think that indexing had served us pretty well for a long period of time," he said.

This trend shows every sign of continuing into 2009. For instance, during the first week of January, the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission, the second congressional commission created by SAFETEA-LU, previewed its transportation financing recommendations. The final report will be released in late January. This commission says it will urge Congress to increase the federal gas tax by 10 cents a gallon and implement immediate gas tax indexing. The commission will further recommend that states raise their gas taxes and make greater use of toll roads and fees for rush-hour driving. And, like the commission before it, this commission will also state that the nation must transition to a system that charges by vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

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Connections 2030 Public Meetings

In November, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) released Connections 2030, Wisconsin's long-range multimodal transportation plan, for public comment. The draft plan identifies proposed policies and actions to ensure that Wisconsin continues its tradition of having a high-quality multimodal transportation system.

On January 7th, WisDOT kicked off a series of public meetings which will be held in numerous locations throughout the state. All meetings will be held from 5:00 to 8:00 pm. The remaining meetings are listed below.

Milwaukee

Wednesday, January 21, 2009
Milwaukee County Downtown Transit Center, Harbor Lights Room
909 E. Michigan Ave., Milwaukee, WI

Kenosha

Tuesday, February 3, 2009
UW-Parkside, Student Center Ballroom
900 Wood Road, Kenosha, WI

Superior

Wednesday, February 11, 2009
UW-Superior, Rothwell Student Center Ballroom
1605 Catlin Ave., Superior, WI

Eau Claire

Thursday, February 12, 2009
Sacred Heart Conference Center
900 W. Clairmont, Eau Claire, WI

Rhineland

Wednesday, February 18, 2009
Rhineland High School Cafeteria
665 Coolidge Ave., Rhineland, WI

Wausau

Thursday, February 19, 2009
Northcentral Technical College
1000 W. Campus Dr., Wausau, WI

Green Bay

Wednesday, February 25, 2009
St. Norbert's College
Bemis International Center
Room 114, Suites A,B,C,D
100 Grant St., De Pere, WI

Oshkosh

Thursday, February 26, 2009
Park Plaza Hotel, Ballroom
One North Main, Oshkosh, WI

WisDOT will accept public comments on the draft plan through February 27, 2009.

Please share your thoughts about the draft plan with WisDOT and also thank the department for the work contained in the plan.

To learn more about Connections 2030 or to view or print copies of plan-related materials, visit the Connections 2030 Web site: www.wiconnections2030.gov.

Obama Chooses Transportation Secretary

In late December, President-elect Obama chose Republican Ray LaHood to be the next secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation. LaHood, 63, is retiring from the U.S. House of Representatives, where he has represented the 18th Congressional District of Illinois since 1995. LaHood served on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee for six years before moving to the Appropriations Committee. LaHood is known for his bipartisanship and network of relationships with members of Congress from both parties.

In announcing his selection Obama stated, "Ray's appointment reflects that bipartisan spirit – a spirit we need to reclaim this country to make progress for the American people."

Transportation in the News

Milwaukee – Up to \$780 million more is needed over the next 25 years to fix the worst residential streets in Milwaukee according to a recent audit. This is despite the new wheel tax. Approximately 20% of local roads are in poor condition. Auditors also found that the public works department is taking on average 106 years to repave or replace local streets. This is down from the peak of 163 years in 2005, but it is still more than twice the streets' expected life span.

The audit goes on to point out that Milwaukee is not alone. Many local and state governments don't have the money to fix infrastructure. "We're in the same boat, the same ship that's sinking everywhere," said Milwaukee Alderman Jim Bohl in response to the audit results.

Colorado – Governor Bill Ritter told the Colorado Committee on Job Creation and Economic Growth that regardless of the amount the state receives from the federal stimulus, it will not come close to solving its long-term transportation problems. The governor's Blue Ribbon Transportation Panel has recommended the state increase transportation funding by a minimum of \$500 million a year – and preferably \$1.5 billion annually.

In addition to lobbying for stimulus money, Ritter says the state must continue to work toward a long-term funding source other than the gas tax. While Ritter acknowledges that the public has no interest in tax or fee increases, increasing the gas tax and some fees, placing tolls on some state highways and public-private partnerships must remain on the table.

Illinois – Parking meters are the latest asset to be leased by the city of Chicago in order to generate much-needed money. The Chicago City Council recently approved a deal to lease city parking meters to a private operator for an up-front payment of \$1.2 billion. Mayor Richard

Daley pushed for the deal as a way for the city to weather tough economic times.

The 75-year lease means hourly meter rates will go up effective January 1st. In some neighborhoods, the rates will quadruple from 25 cents now to \$1. Top meter rates in the Loop will increase from \$3 to \$3.50 this year and to \$6.50 in 2013. Chicago will have some of the highest meter rates in the nation.

The city has a pending \$2.5 billion deal to lease Midway Airport and already has leased the Chicago Skyway and parking garages.

Rhode Island – Governor Donald Carcieri's Blue Ribbon Panel for Transportation Funding released a draft report recently recommending that Rhode Island should consider the following options to raise more money for transportation:

- Charge tolls on interstate highways at the state's border
- Create a new tax for each mile a vehicle is driven
- Toll a new Sakonnet River Bridge
- Increase the state gas tax (from 30 cents to 45 cents by 2016)
- Hike vehicle registration fees.

The final recommendations will be forwarded to the governor and the General Assembly.

Interesting News Coverage

New York Times, December 1, 2008 – “Gas Tax Hikes Gaining Traction across the Globe” <http://greeninc.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/01/gas-tax-hikes-gaining-traction-across-the-globe/>

National Journal.com, December 2, 2008 – “How to Write the Next Transportation Bill?” <http://transportation.nationaljournal.com/2008/12/writing-the-next-transportation-bill.php>

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, December 20, 2008 – “The Big Squeeze: Property owners increasingly bear the burden of government. They won’t stand for it forever.” <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/36468809.html>

The Bond Buyer, December 31, 2008 – “The Transportation Effect: Worries Grow Over Stimulus Consequences” <http://www.bondbuyer.com/article.html?id=200812290CSL9WSN&pagenum=1&numpages=3>

The New York Times guest commentary, January 6, 2009 – “Why You’ll Love Paying for Roads that Used to be Free” <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/06/why-youll-love-paying-for-roads-that-used-to-be-free-a-guest-post/>

Thanks to these and other recommendations about transportation policy and funding, we can see that reality appears to be setting in that, as a nation and a state, we can no longer bury our heads in the sand about our crumbling infrastructure. One of the commissioners who served on the second federal commission may have summed it up best. Adrian Moore, vice-president of the Reason Foundation (a libertarian think tank) said, “I’m not excited about a gas tax increase, but the reality is our current gas tax doesn’t pay for upkeep of the system we have now. We can either let the roads go to hell or we can pay more.”

The one thing that could unravel all of this newfound and timely desire to face reality, however, would be to divert any of this money from transportation to other purposes. Lest we forget, one of the reasons Wisconsin no longer has gas tax indexing, and one of the reasons the federal government has gone 15 years without increasing the gas tax, is because the public lost faith that the additional money they paid would go for its stated purpose.

That is the last bit of reality we need to face. And if we do, we can say that we’ve found both the will and the way to truly begin to rebuild our state and our country.

Association Notes

Calendar of Events

Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Connections 2030 public meetings

– WisDOT has scheduled a series of public meetings in numerous locations throughout the state. Residents are invited to attend to learn about Connections 2030, ask questions, and submit comments. Visit <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/state/2030-draft-meetings.htm> for meeting dates, times, and locations.

Wisconsin Transportation Reception during the TRB Annual Meeting – Sunday, January 11th at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. Visit TDA's website, www.tdawisconsin.org for more information.

TDA Fly-in to Washington, D.C. – April 21st-22nd. Visit TDA's website, www.tdawisconsin.org, for more information.

If you know of an upcoming event that would be of interest to TDA members, please forward information to the TDA office, general@tdawisconsin.org.

TDA Welcomes a New Member

Johnson Timber Corporation

2009 TDA Fly-in

April 21st & 22nd

The new Congress has convened. Now is the time to begin making your Fly-in travel arrangements.

Every year, we must present our case for transportation and express appreciation for the efforts of our delegation. Visit the TDA website, www.tdawisconsin.org, for event information and some specific reasons you should join the 19th annual TDA Fly-in to Washington, D.C.

Please participate to show your support for Wisconsin transportation.

Don't wait. The deadline for registration is February 8, 2009.

Save on AAA Membership, Auto & Home Insurance



Visit the AAA website for a listing of membership benefits. You'll also be eligible for high-quality auto and home insurance coverage through AAA at a discounted TDA group rate too. Keep in mind, even if you already have AAA membership or insurance through AAA, you can save even more under this group plan. Enrollment is convenient through a statewide network of AAA offices.

Go to www.aaa.com or call 1-800-236-1300 to find an office near you.

To receive your AAA discount provide your AAA group number TRN003.

Join today and take advantage of the great benefits and savings.