



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.

## September 2009

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## Transportation Revenue Shortfall Leads to \$49 Million Deficit

On August 27th, the Joint Finance Committee rejected a request from the state Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to address a projected deficit in the transportation fund of \$49 million at the close of 2008-09. The deficit is due to revenue collections that did not keep pace with the appropriation levels established for the 2007-09 biennium.

The economic decline has led to not only lower than anticipated gas tax collections but also registration fee revenue. For the first time in over 30 years, the number of vehicles registered in Wisconsin dropped – 26,800 from last year or 0.6 percent.

The WisDOT request proposed to reduce approximately \$33 million from two highway improvement programs along with approximately \$16 million in appropriations lapses and cuts that had already been achieved.

There is no legislative proposal at this point to address the deficit.

Visit [http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/Section1310/2009\\_08\\_27\\_DOT\\_9.pdf](http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/Section1310/2009_08_27_DOT_9.pdf) to read the Legislative Fiscal Bureau's analysis of the issue.

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# Executive Perspective

By Craig Thompson, TDA Executive Director

## Giving Credit Where Credit is Due

The members of the legislature's Joint Finance Committee deserve credit for recently making a bipartisan statement on the importance of sustained transportation investment. The 16-member committee voted 13-0 (three members were absent) to reject the Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) recommendation to cut the Highway Rehabilitation Program by \$18 million and the Majors Highway Program by \$15 million in order to help fill a deficit.

WisDOT faces a \$49.1 million deficit due to lower-than-projected gas tax revenues and registration fees. In addition to the \$33 million in proposed cuts to these two highway improvement programs, the WisDOT proposal also included nearly \$16 million in appropriations lapses and cuts that had already been achieved. In the department's defense, its options were limited. The department cannot print the money and it doesn't have authority to raise the money. So the department put forward a proposal to make the expenditures meet the revenues.

For the elected officials who do have the authority to do something about the deficit, however, the immediate needs on our roadways made erasing the appropriations tough to swallow. These are just a few of the issues that our elected officials may have been considering when making their decision:

- Findings from the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers that downgrade the conditions of our roads from a C- to a D+.
- Results of recent studies demonstrating that structural deficiencies in our roadways cause more deaths every year than drunk driving or speeding or not wearing seat belts.
- Changes to the posted weight limits on

the Milwaukee Zoo interchange, which are necessary to slow the deterioration of the interchange.

- Estimates that the \$33 million will put more than 600 Wisconsinites to work at a time in which we have skilled highway laborers out of work and Wisconsin is hemorrhaging jobs in other sectors as well.

The Joint Finance Committee vote was a positive statement. At this point, however, that is all it was – a statement. Rejecting the proposal did not automatically generate the money needed to make up for the department's lower than anticipated revenue. If no further action is taken, all we will have accomplished is to push a deficit forward.

If the legislature, however, continues this bipartisan commitment to transportation – and comes up with the funding to fill WisDOT's budget gap later this year – lawmakers will deserve more than credit, they will deserve our gratitude.

And, of course, no matter what the legislature does this year, the larger issue is that existing revenue streams are not sufficient to meet even current transportation needs. Recent developments, such as new CAFE standards, "cash for clunkers" and the Chevy Volt, remind us that the underlying problem of transportation funding is our continued over-reliance on the gas tax.

The next legislature can tackle this fundamental issue by taking action not only to address the current investment in our transportation network but to also put us on a path so that we can sustain the necessary investment into the future. If our elected officials take that action then they will deserve far more than our gratitude – they will deserve the Wisconsin they helped to rebuild.

## Zoo Interchange Weight Limits Posted

In August, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) announced weight limits on the Zoo Interchange. According to state transportation officials, they imposed the weight limits to slow the deterioration that was discovered in recent examinations of the bridges in the interchange.

The weight restrictions on the various ramps are as follows:

- Northbound I-894/US 45 through the interchange to north US 45 (60,000 pound limit/30 tons)
- Southbound US 45 to the eastbound I-94 connector ramp (70,000 pound limit/35 tons)
- Northbound I-894/US 45 to the westbound I-94 ramp (80,000 pound limit/40 tons)

Vehicles exceeding the posted weight limits will need to use alternative routes.

The weight limits will be in effect for at least several months while a contractor determines what, if any, repairs are appropriate at this time.

“Our first priority is safety,” WisDOT Secretary Frank Busalacchi said. “These ramps will continue to safely handle traffic in the busy interchange. By restricting heavy loads, we decrease wear and tear on the bridges and preserve the integrity of the structures until they can be rehabilitated or replaced.”

Construction to replace the interchange was once anticipated to begin in 2012. However, the start of the project has been pushed back several years due to the state’s current finances and the cost of the project – projected to be in excess of \$2 billion.

The Zoo Interchange was built in 1963 and is the busiest interchange in Wisconsin carrying over 350,000 cars each day.

## GM Announces Chevy Volt to Get 230 MPG

General Motors (GM) created quite a buzz when it announced that the Chevrolet Volt electric car could get up to 230 miles per gallon in city driving. If confirmed by regulators, the Volt would be the first U.S. vehicle to achieve triple-digit fuel economy.

Unlike the Prius, the Volt is not a traditional hybrid vehicle where a combustion engine combines with a high-powered battery to increase fuel efficiency. The Volt is powered by an electric motor and battery pack with a 40-mile range. After the charge on the battery is spent, a small internal combustion engine kicks in to generate electricity for a total range of 300 miles. The battery pack can be recharged from a standard home outlet.

GM calculated the 230 mile per gallon figure using Environmental Protection Agency draft guidelines for determining the mileage for extended-range electric vehicles. Drivers who drive less than 40 miles between charges could in theory burn no gas, while industry insiders estimate on average 50 miles per gallon once the engine kicks in. GM has yet to release highway mileage estimates, but company officials are confident the highway mileage will be triple-digit.

The first-generation Volt is expected to cost \$40,000, well above the price range of most consumers even with a \$7,500 tax credit from the government. However, future generations of the vehicle are expected to drop in price. Current production of the vehicle is 10 per week.

While the Volt and its related technology is not likely to make up a significant portion of the U.S. car inventory in the near future, GM’s announcement should serve as another reminder of the need for a timely transition to new user fees and away from the gas tax as the major source of funding for transportation at both the state and federal levels.

# Technologically Feasible VMT System for the Near Future

A system drawing heavily on existing technology could be implemented in the near future to determine vehicle mileage and to assess road user charges according to a report issued by the Intelligent Transportation Systems Institute at the University of Minnesota.

The report, *Technology Enabling Near-Term Nationwide Implementation of Distance-Based Road User Fees*, doesn't address policy issues. Instead the authors assert that "Policy needs should drive technology."

The report describes a system meant for near-term deployment that determines the distance traveled by a vehicle and uses this as a basis for charging a fee that reflects road use. They key features of the system are summarized as follows:

- Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is calculated by an in-vehicle device that is connected to the vehicle data bank and powered through a single standard connector available on all passenger vehicles since 1996. The connector's primary purpose has been for engine diagnostics by repair garages and emissions control monitoring.
- Wireless VMT data communication is via text messaging, which is available everywhere that cellular service is accessible. Distance data is transmitted through text messaging to a billing center. No specialized new infrastructure needs to be deployed.
- VMT can be aggregated by zones (i.e. by state, county, rural or urban) using the same cellular technology used for wireless communication. No Global Positioning System (GPS) is required and to maximize privacy, no longitude or latitude data of any kind is used in the core platform.

The report also addresses the means for providing payment (and receiving credit for motor fuel use taxes paid at the pump), compliance, enforcement, transparency and privacy. The authors acknowledge that "Privacy and public acceptance concerns are the top obstacles to transitioning to a new transportation finance system."

Visit <http://www.its.umn.edu/news/> to view the report.

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## Coast Guard Proposes Ballast Water Standards

The Coast Guard recently proposed national standards for regulating the release in port of ships' ballast water. The plan would establish a limit on the number of invasive organisms that can be released along with a ship's ballast water while in port. The limit would originally follow a formula used by the International Maritime Commission. By 2016, the goal is to establish a national standard similar to California's, which is considered 1,000 times stricter than the limits set by the international commission's formula.

TDA has long advocated for federal legislation establishing consistent national - rather than state - standards for the treatment of ship ballast water to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species and a federal research program to develop ballast-water treatment technology. However, Congress has been slow to act.

A federal court ruled during the Bush Administration that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can establish ballast water standards under the Clean Water Act. Earlier this year, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson indicated that she would consider tougher rules to protect the Great Lakes from invasive species that hitch

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## Wisconsin Celebrates Ports

Wisconsin is unique in the nation for having 20 commercial ports, including five that provide strictly passenger services, strategically situated along the three waterways that border the state. In recognition of the contributions these ports make to Wisconsin's environment, economy and quality of life, Governor Jim Doyle officially proclaimed August 24-30 Wisconsin Ports Week. The proclamation included a salute to the state's port-related industries and to the Wisconsin Commercial Ports Association (WCPA), which held its annual meeting in Sturgeon Bay on August 26-27.

Wisconsin's commercial ports generate \$1.3 billion in annual economic activity and employ more than 11,000 Wisconsin workers. Some \$7 billion in cargo from all over the world is transported through these ports each year, including commodities essential for agriculture, industry and business. And Wisconsin ports make it possible for ships to move freight using the least amount of fuel and generating fewer harmful emissions than any other mode of transport.

The Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin sponsors Wisconsin Ports Week each year to increase public awareness of the importance of the state's commercial ports. Visit the TDA website, [www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), to read the governor's proclamation, get more facts about Wisconsin ports, and download three Highway H2O public service announcements.

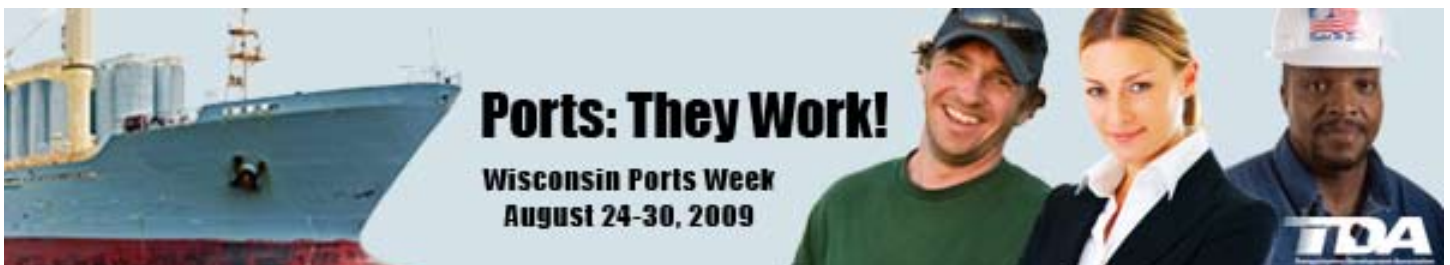
## Transportation in the News

Amtrak – Ridership in July dropped for the ninth consecutive month. Amtrak officials attribute this decline to the nation's economic recession and its impact on business travel. The railroad's total number of passenger fell 8.4 percent in July compared to last year. The breakdown of the decrease is as follows: 9.6 percent on short-distance routes, 4.9 percent on long-distance routes and 12 percent on the Acela Express. Prior to the fall of 2008, Amtrak had set ridership records in each of the previous six years.

Minnesota – Despite the gas tax increase the Minnesota Legislature agreed to 18 months ago, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has projected it will face a \$50 billion funding gap over the next 20 years. MnDOT's new 20-year plan identifies \$65 billion in transportation needs around the state but only \$15 billion in resources to address them – even after the stimulus funds. In 2008, Minnesota enacted an 8.5-cent gas tax increase, which will be fully phased in by 2012.

"I think people felt that these increases would essentially take care of our needs," said Tom Sorel, Minnesota's transportation commissioner. However, with much of the state's highway system past its prime, needs are simply outpacing state resources.

Oregon – Earlier this year, Governor Ted Kulongoski signed an annual \$300 million highway improvement program to be funded with a six-cent fuel tax increase and higher vehicle fees. Because of the recession, the



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gas tax increase will not kick in until there have been two consecutive quarters of employment growth or January 2011, whichever comes first. Now opponents of raising the fuel tax have filed a referendum petition with the secretary of state in an attempt to block the increase. Over 55,000 valid signatures have to be gathered by September 25th to place the question before voters. If the signatures are certified, the referendum is expected to take place next May.

Massachusetts – Toll opponents have filed two ballot measures with the Massachusetts attorney general's office to eliminate tolls on the Massachusetts Turnpike, Tobin Bridge and Boston Harbor tunnels by Jan. 1, 2012 and to bar the creation of any new tolled facilities. The measures call for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to establish a new trust fund to cover the debt on the existing turnpike system.

If the attorney general's office determines the measures are constitutional, supporters would have to collect over 66,000 valid signatures by December 2nd. In 1998, the state Supreme Judicial Court ruled against a proposed ballot question to eliminate tolls.

New York City – Mayor Bloomberg recently announced that the city has commissioned an electric vehicle study to explore how electric vehicle technology must be adapted for city dwelling. Most residents of New York City and other large urban cities don't have a driveway or private garage where they can plug in their vehicle. Instead, they park on the street or in large lots or garages that are not equipped with power outlets at each space. The study is part of PlaNYC, the city's sustainability plan, which has the stated goal of a 44 percent reduction in transportation emissions by 2030.

## Interesting New Coverage

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel August 29, 2009 – Speeding toward regional rail <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/55890947.html>

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel August 29, 2009 – Rail's vast, different kind of price <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/55890957.html>

Chicago Tribune August 20, 2009 – Chicago trims freight rail plan <http://www.joc.com/node/412985>

National Journal August 18, 2009 – Should existing interstate highways be tolled? <http://transportation.nationaljournal.com/2009/08/should-existing-interstate-hig.php>

Chicago Tribune August 10, 2009 – Are 110-m.p.h. trains on the right track? 1930s locomotives routinely hit 100 m.p.h.; experts say the new target should be 220 m.p.h. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/chi-getting-around-10-aug10,0,2464080.column>

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*Ballast Water continued from page 4*

rides into the region aboard oceangoing vessels. While some in Congress urged the Obama Administration to have the Coast Guard and EPA work together to develop a single strict standard, the EPA position is that if the agencies propose different standards, the stronger one would be followed.

The Ballast Water Discharge Standard Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) package was published in the Federal Register on August 28th for public review and comment. The comment period is set for 90 days. There will be four public meetings nationwide to facilitate additional public input. The meetings will be held in Seattle, WA, Chicago, IL, New Orleans, LA and Washington, D.C. Dates and details have not yet been finalized.

# Association Notes

## 2009 TDA Annual Meeting

### **BUILDING WISCONSIN'S NEW ECONOMY**

OCTOBER 1, 2009 MONONA TERRACE MADISON

It has been hard to escape the deluge of news over the last year about the tremendous challenges that Wisconsin and the country face. During these unsettling times it can be easy to dwell on the negative. Despite all of the challenges, however, Wisconsin has significant opportunities to expand and grow in the emerging new economy. The decisions we make in the immediate future will determine whether Wisconsin seizes these opportunities for growth.

Please attend the 2009 TDA Annual Meeting to hear from state and national experts regarding the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for Wisconsin and the important role transportation plays.

Visit the TDA website, [www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), for more information and a registration form.



### Save these Dates

- 2010 TDA Fly-in – March 10th-11th

Visit the events page on the TDA website, [www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), for event details and any future changes in the schedule.

### 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.

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