

ICYMI: Communities All Over Wisconsin Face Harsh Realities on Transportation Funding

MILWAUKEE – Milwaukee County isn't the only locality facing tough choices when it comes to funding transportation and infrastructure needs; as Milwaukee County explores a \$60 vehicle registration fee to save our transit system and continue paying down deferred maintenance, a statewide series of townhalls reveals that other communities are exploring new revenue, service cuts, and project delays.

At "Turnout for Transportation" events last week sponsored by the Transportation Development Association, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Wisconsin Counties Association, the Wisconsin Towns Association, and the Wisconsin Highway Association, local elected officials and members of the community from all 72 counties discussed the impact of declining state aid for transportation on their local budgets. The state is forecast to have a \$1 billion deficit in its upcoming budget, meaning the trend of declining support for localities is unlikely to reverse itself.

In Fond du Lac, town of Eldorado chairperson Gary Miller said, "We are all hurting for money, we are all in the same boat." And the [Fond du Lac Reporter](#) notes that, "Many who attended the meeting felt the situation was critical enough to call for increasing the gas tax and vehicle registration fee — the only means left to address failing transportation infrastructures."

Fond du Lac County Executive Al Buechel also said citizens need to put pressure on the state and elected officials to fund transportation project needs.

The [Superior Telegram](#) is reporting that, according to Douglas County Board Chairman Mark Liebaert, "The problem is trying to come up with increasing dollars with decreasing transportation dollars. Our county is not the only one having to deal with borrowing money to meet those obligations ... the transportation infrastructure is crumbling before our eyes."

In Manitowoc, citizens and lawmakers alike expressed frustration about borrowing and deferred maintenance. According to the [Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter](#):

"Well, it's frustrating, you know," said Joel Aulik of the Town of Liberty. "We borrowed \$234,000 to do 2 miles of road and the taxpayers are picking that up. And we're going on a 180-year cycle for replacing our roads. Do you know a road that lasts 180 years?"

"Doing nothing is not an option that we can consider, we just can't," state Rep. Paul Tittl (R-Manitowoc) said. "We need to look at this for our future, we need to look at these towns ... we need to listen to them when they are gathering in such a mass to tell us this problem."

In Ellsworth, the [Pierce County Herald](#) reports:

"Some towns are borrowing money for road projects, and some towns are making difficult decisions, having to choose between maintenance equipment upgrades and road projects."

Those are the dilemmas municipalities across the state are facing in the stark reality of lack of transportation funding coming from the state, said Pierce County Highway Commissioner Chad Johnson.

And in an editorial released earlier this week, state Senator Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point) noted that, "Delaying these repair and replacement projects will only make them more expensive when they are finally started. Meanwhile, a growing share of our transportation spending must go to pay the interest

on the state's past borrowing. Even some Republican legislators have said that this course is unsustainable; we can't just keep kicking the can down the same pothole-filled road."

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