

Wisconsin Roads Desperate for Leadership

By State Senator Jon Erpenbach, 27th District

The Department of Transportation audit announcement felt like a sucker punch to the gut. Projects in the works for our state roads have cost \$3 billion more than projected. \$3 billion more than the Legislature planned for. This is simply unbelievable. Wisconsin roads have gone from 53% “good” to 41% “good” in just five years.

How do our roads deteriorate that much in just five years? Complete lack of adequate funding. The 2011 state budget cut road funding by delaying projects, postponing large projects and cutting funds to rural roads in Wisconsin. Each and every budget since then has done the same thing. The Transportation Fund has been in crisis mode since the Legislature repealed the indexing of the gas tax and there have been no true solutions put forth by the majority party.

Before the last biennial budget, this crisis was truly recognized statewide by all Legislators and the Governor. Governor Walker even asked his Transportation Secretary to come up with possible solutions to this economic crisis. A group of experts met and they came up with many different options for ensuring that our immediate road needs and our long term funding crisis could be addressed. Governor Walker and the Republican majority rejected each and every idea this group of experts put forth. Instead, they chose to borrow once again for our roads and delayed projects, postponed large projects, and cut funding to rural roads. It is like ground hogs day with an increasingly bumpy road.

Why is funding for roads so important? First and foremost is the safety of all of us going where we need to go. Hazardous roads equal unsafe roads for our families. Second is the economy. How can we expect our lagging economy to improve if we don't have the infrastructure to support the businesses that work here? How can we expect new businesses to move into a state that has 41% “poor” roads? From farms to factories, road travel is still the cheapest and fastest way for businesses to move products and supplies. We will never catch up to our neighboring states if we do not invest in our roads.

Delaying and bonding and backfilling have been used time and time again to fund our roads and it simply is not working. Over 20 cents on every dollar we are spending now to build our roads is going to financing of yesterday's projects. This credit card, funding scheme has to stop.

I stand ready, as I have for the last six years, willing to work with any Legislator with the strength to find a short term and long term solution for transportation funding. Governor Walker and Legislative Republicans need to put their money where their mouths are and help this state. No more excuses. **For more information on the Legislative Audit of the Department of Transportation or the Transportation Financing crisis contact my office at 608-266-6670 or 888-549-0027 or sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov**