



Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions

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On behalf of the Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions (AWTA), President Tom Diehl reacted to the shortsighted Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) decision to cancel the study of widening Interstate 39-90-94 from Madison to Portage and the Interstate 90-94 of Portage to Wisconsin Dells as well as the replacement of several deteriorating bridges over the Wisconsin River. This along with all the other transportation projects either cut or delayed will have a major negative impact on the future of a growing tourism industry.

“The decision to cancel this study is extremely shortsighted,” Diehl stated. “To spend close to \$3.5 million based on a clear need that has been long identified and then pull the plug can only be described as *wasteful*. The taxpayers of Wisconsin deserve a better explanation from the DOT as to why they would so dramatically change their direction.” Additionally, “We are very concerned that DOT has added ‘*reliever routes*’ into the discussion as we don’t see the need for this distraction as the Portage to Wisconsin Dells leg is only 16 miles.”

During the summer the road from Portage to Wisconsin Dells is easily one of the most congested in the state almost every weekend. These delays cause problems for the tourism industry in attracting visitors, plus it adds challenges to other businesses that need the highways to get their products to market. The heavy congestion also presents safety concerns for motorists.

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Tourism generates **\$19.3 billion** in business sales and supports more than **190,000 direct and indirect jobs**. The \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes generated from tourist spending each year reduces tax burden by \$640 for the average household.

“I am very concerned about tourism taking a serious hit as travelers change their habits because other options might have fewer travel constraints,” Diehl said. “None of this would even be necessary if the Governor and lawmakers could agree on a long-term funding solution to address our transportation needs.”

Wisconsin Dells has become a year-round tourism destination. The Dells businesses and the other tourism attractions along this vital corridor need the state to continue with their plan and finish this study. AWTA members need this study to be completed to move forward with the final expansion of I-39-90-94.

President Trump has discussed major investments in infrastructure and without this study completion it is unlikely that Wisconsin will be able to compete for new federal highway dollars related to this project.

AWTA members are asking the Governor and the Legislature to direct the DOT to finish the study and look at a long-term funding solution for the Wisconsin’s highway needs. Driver safety and long term business viability demand a strong sustainable solution.

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