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## **WAUKESHA COUNTY EXECUTIVE: LEAVING EAST-WEST OUT OF STATE BUDGET WILL HURT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WASTE BILLIONS OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS AND CREATE MORE DELAYS FOR MOTORISTS**

***As Madison considers delaying critical fix yet again, Farrow joins regional business leaders in call to keep I-94 East-West reconstruction – and Wisconsin's healthy economy – moving forward***

MILWAUKEE – Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow today joined members of [I-94 East-West Econ Connect](#), a coalition of Waukesha and Milwaukee County businesses, organizations and institutions working to keep Wisconsin's economy strong, in calling on lawmakers to restore funding in the 2017-19 State Budget to keep the planned reconstruction of the I-94 East-West corridor on track.

In a news conference alongside the East-West corridor near the Menomonee Valley, Farrow said that rebuilding the severely outdated freeway – one of Wisconsin's most important commercial arteries, the link between the newly modernized Marquette and Zoo interchanges and the key economic connector between Milwaukee and Waukesha counties – must be a priority for the state.

"If Madison doesn't enumerate the East-West rebuild in the 2017-19 budget and allocate approximately \$31 million to keep the project moving forward as planned, legislators will have essentially moved this back to square one," Farrow said. "And that would be a travesty."

"There are nearly 200,000 jobs located within just two miles of the East-West, and companies rely on the road to transport more than \$40 billion in freight every year," he continued. "As legislators prepare to make their final budget decisions and proposals, they need to know that kicking the can down the road on the East-West is a bad idea that will hurt economic development, waste taxpayer dollars and subject motorists to many more years of orange barrels and traffic headaches. No more delays – it's time to finish the job and make the East-West a priority."

Farrow was joined by representatives of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), the Waukesha County Business Alliance (WCBA) and Commercial Association of REALTORS® Wisconsin (CARW). They urged the public to call the state's Legislative Hotline at 1-800-362-9472 and tell lawmakers to put the East-West back in the state budget.

If legislators do stall the East-West project, it will put federal funding and other state investments at risk, said Steve Baas, senior vice president of governmental affairs for the MMAC.

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“The full benefits of the State’s \$2.5 billion investment in the Marquette and Zoo interchange projects won’t be realized if these new, modern interchanges continue to feed into an old, deteriorating and woefully inadequate corridor,” he said. “By putting the project back on track, legislators would also protect \$20 million the state has already invested in East-West planning and engineering, work that would likely need to be redone if reconstruction is delayed further.”

Additionally, Baas said, without reconstruction the crumbling roadway will require yet another Band-Aid repaving in 2020 that will cost up to \$60 million, close lanes for one to two years and do nothing to solve the road’s underlying structural and design problems.

Tracy Johnson, president and CEO of CARW, said not fixing the East-West corridor puts the state at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting new business and jobs.

“From an economic growth perspective, Wisconsin can’t be open for a business if one of the most critical stretches of freeway in the state doesn’t work the way it should,” she said. “A recent survey by *Area Development* magazine found that when companies make decisions on where to build or expand, their No. 1 consideration is highway accessibility. States that want to grow jobs and their local economy need to stay focused on this. It makes good business sense for Wisconsin to complete vital projects like the East-West that are key to achieving important goals tied to business recruitment, expansion and jobs.”

It’s critical for legislators to act now, said Jeff Hoffman, Policy Board chair for WCBA.

“The major, negative consequences of further delaying East-West reconstruction will hurt area businesses and job creators,” Hoffman said. “Most of the products made in our region travel the East-West Corridor on their way to customers worldwide. The East-West connects our citizens to jobs, health care and educational opportunities. It carries people to baseball games, Summerfest, State Fair and other tourism attractions that make our region strong and vibrant.

“We hear it all the time from businesses looking to expand or relocate within the region – easy access to the highway and a robust transportation system are big priorities,” he added. “The State will realize significant and real economic opportunity by keeping the East-West project moving forward.”

The I-94 East-West Corridor runs for 3.5 miles between 16<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> streets, connecting Milwaukee and Waukesha counties to points beyond. Designed in the 1950s and built in the 1960s, it now carries 30,000 more vehicles per day than originally intended, with outdated features like left-side ramps, narrow shoulders and short weaving lanes that fail to provide safe operating conditions for current traffic. The average crash rate is 2-3 times higher than the statewide urban freeway average and at some points, more than 4 times higher.

Full reconstruction and modernization of the East-West Corridor has been on the state’s agenda for years and approximately \$20 million has already been spent on engineering, planning and environmental study for the effort. After analyzing several design options, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration identified a preferred alternative that cuts project costs and includes essential safety upgrades and a neighborhood-sensitive design. The project has been delayed once already by two years, pushing an earliest start to 2020-21. In February 2017, however, all funding to keep it moving forward was unexpectedly cut from the State Budget proposal. If funding is not restored for 2017-19, there will be another two years of delay, or more.

“The East-West should be a priority for Wisconsin,” Farrow said. “We encourage everyone to call 1-800-362-9472 and tell their legislators no more delays on the East-West.”

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