

RESPONSE TO GOVERNOR WALKER'S MOST RECENT STATEMENT ON TRANSPORTATION

Governor Walker recently stated that “there are some groups out there that want to spend billions and billions and billions of dollars on more, bigger, wider interchanges across the state.” This statement implies that decisions to recommend highway expansion projects are being driven by outside groups, possibly with a vested interest, and not based on a proper evaluation of purpose and need. That is not true.

The decision to recommend expansion of a highway is not driven by politics or vested interests. Before any major project can be approved, both federal and state law require a detailed study of many alternatives to find the one that provides an acceptable level of congestion and safety with the least cost and environmental impact. The alternative finally selected may or may not include expansion. Public involvement through informational meetings and hearings is an important part of the study process.

Take the example of a project in Milwaukee that the Governor originally supported but then postponed indefinitely – the 3.5 mile stretch of the East-West Freeway between the Marquette and Zoo Interchanges. The study document on that project is 946 pages long, and cost over \$20 million to prepare. It includes a detailed evaluation of no less than seven design alternatives, including some that add capacity and some that do not. The expansion option was selected because it will reduce congestion to an acceptable level while lowering crash rates by an estimated 23 percent, when compared to simple replacement of the current highway. The same level of scrutiny is applied to other large scale projects.

Governor Walker links this change in policy to his prediction that vehicle travel will decline in the future, despite the fact that it has risen steadily since the end of the recession. Most highways being actively considered for expansion in Wisconsin are already unacceptably congested today, causing delay, economic loss and higher crash rates. How much risk are we willing to accept to see if the Governor’s predictions hold true? If they don’t, we will have spent billions of dollars to duplicate 1960 era designs that will be obsolete the day they are built.

The Governor’s seemingly offhand comment that the decision to widen our highways is driven by outside interests is not factually based, and is profoundly disrespectful to the professionals in the private and public sector who are trained to design and build safe and efficient highways for all to use.

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