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CONTACT: Elizabeth Ward, Elizabeth.ward@sierraclub.org, (608) 445-4489

Local Leaders, Community Members to Show Gaps in Wisconsin's Transportation System

New report highlights the growing need for transit access across the state

Wisconsin – This week transit riders, activists and transportation experts held six press conference across the state and a teleconference to release the a first-of-its-kind report, [Arrive Together: Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin](#), which shows how people's needs are not being met by the state's transportation system. The report examines the effectiveness of public transit access to major employers and other areas of interest in nine cities and regions across Wisconsin, ranging in size from [Milwaukee](#) to Hayward.

Statewide, the report's authors identify a lack of transit access to school, work, the grocery store, the doctor's office, and other needs. These gaps in the transportation system disproportionately impact those who are unable to drive or cannot afford to drive - including seniors, people with disabilities, low- to middle-income Wisconsinites, and young people.

"We have a fine Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) fixed route system here in [La Crosse](#), but it unfortunately does not have the resources to expand as we might prefer. For example, I could not use the MTU to attend to my mother and stepfather during their final years because, although they had a La Crosse address, they did not live on a bus route. There was no easy way I could get to them to provide the help and support I would have liked to," said **Rhonda Staats, transit rider and chair of Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired's Legislative Committee.**

Marina Minic, UW Madison sophomore and WISPIRG volunteer said, "living in [Madison](#) has really influenced my perspective on transportation. Living somewhere with good public transit will be a key factor in deciding where I live after graduation. I grew up in Hudson, Wisconsin,

right across the border from Minneapolis. There was no public transit available in Hudson, and there weren't many bike lanes or paths either. If you wanted to have a job, you needed a car."

"When I began working on transportation issues in Wisconsin, I was shocked to find out that many of our agencies measure our transportation system's effectiveness on the number of cars that move or the number of riders that are on a bus, rather than if people can travel to the places they need to go to have a high quality of life. Our transportation system is failing us, and it is especially failing those who do not or cannot drive," said **Cassie Steiner, report author and Public Relations and Outreach Associate at the Sierra Club - John Muir Chapter**. "Every place has unique challenges, but one thing is common across all of the places we surveyed: there is a lack of investment in public transportation, and that's hurting our communities."

The report concludes that, while each community faces unique challenges in providing transportation access to employment, medical services, major businesses, local attractions or other points of interest, the absence of consistent and sufficient funding for public transportation is a major hurdle across the board. Demographic changes will likely exacerbate these challenges in the future: Statewide, communities are already struggling to meet the transportation needs of a growing population of seniors, and to retain young people who increasingly want to live in transit-friendly, walkable, bikeable towns and cities.

Ray Grosch, member of the [Waukesha](#) Transportation Equity Coalition and one of the report authors, explained summed up the report, "This report examines how well the transportation system is working for those people who are unable to drive, or can't drive, or don't want to drive. Sadly, the answer is: not very well."

"Transit service to areas of the City of [Eau Claire](#) that have developed as major employment centers within the last thirty years, such as the Menard's Distribution Center, are not served by transit because state funding has not kept pace with the growing needs," said **Jeremy Gragert, a board member of the Chippewa Valley Transit Alliance, and an Eau Claire City Council member**.

Rick Detienne, member of [Valley](#) Transit Commission said, "we do not now, nor have we had for some time, sufficient financial resources to adequately fund public transportation for many of our citizens: people with disabilities, our elderly, or for workers just looking for a cost-effective and environmentally responsible ride to and from their jobs. Our funding shortfall limits both the frequency of service and the areas that can be effectively covered."

The authors identify increased transit funding and better coordination between municipalities as viable solutions to many transportation challenges outlined in the report. **Kathi Zoern**, transit rider and NAOMI leader in [Wausau](#), explained, "Many people in our community assume that everyone can just get to Rothschild, Schofield, Weston and Rib Mountain on the bus, but there is no bus moving through those communities." **Zoern** was unable to get to the DMV for a voter ID card by transit and would have to pay for a taxi cab.

"We need to get our priorities straight, it is imperative that we increase funding for public transportation in the state budget that will allow for much needed transit capital improvements, new routes and increased frequency of service. We also need regional transportation options that will connect Wisconsin communities to each other and open up access to opportunity," said **Ashwat Narayanan, Director of Transportation Policy at 1000 Friends of Wisconsin**.

Arrive Together: Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin was released by [1000 Friends of Wisconsin](#), [Chippewa Valley Transit Alliance](#), [CUSH](#), [NAOMI](#), [MICAHA](#), [ESTHER](#), [Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter](#), [SOPHIA](#), [Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired](#) and [WISDOM](#), with support from the [Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group \(WISPIRG\)](#).

To view a full copy of the report, visit sierraclub.org/Wisconsin/ArriveTogetherReport.

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