



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

# Milwaukee County

CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

December 5, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
c/o Rep. Keith Ripp, Chairman  
Room 223 North, State Capitol  
PO Box 8953  
Madison WI 53708

via electronic mail

To the Honorable Chairman Ripp and members --

Thank you for beginning hearings on the state transportation budget and the related funding concerns. Leadership is needed in these times to layout a sustainable, responsible, and pragmatic plan for the development and maintenance of our transportation infrastructure. As a local government leader with responsibilities for many modes of transportation in Milwaukee County, I urge your careful consideration of the transportation network in Wisconsin and offer input on the issues facing Milwaukee County.

Developing and managing a robust transportation network has historically been a joint responsibility of all levels of government, with the heaviest share of funding coming from state and federal resources. In recent years, though, these resources have declined substantially and the future outlook is uncertain. State funding for mass transit – the largest source of revenue for the Milwaukee County Transit System – in 2015 was below 2011 levels by more than \$4 million, a decline of more than 6 percent, while expenses naturally have risen. State funding for local roads and county highways follows a similar pattern, dropping by 25 percent since 2007. In light of these reductions and the uncertainty about future funding and in the face of the County's ongoing infrastructure and operating needs, the 2017 adopted County budget includes a \$30 vehicle registration fee (VRF) to support transportation needs in Milwaukee County.

The County Board and I have taken the tough political step of implementing the VRF to begin to secure the transportation network in our county. Beyond borrowing more money (which I have worked hard to reduce those liabilities in recent years), the VRF is the only tool the County has lawful permission to exercise towards this goal. Now, Milwaukee County's taxpayers and citizens need the historic state and federal partnership for transportation to be renewed and strengthened. Namely, the County needs the state to step forward in this budget and find a solution for funding of the transportation network.

As you deliberate the appropriate ways to improve revenues, control costs, and appropriate expenditures the following should be carefully considered:

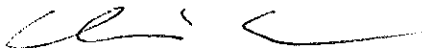
- 1) Reductions to highway and local road aids and mass transit should be restored to funding levels before the reductions induced by the Great Recession. Such restorations of funding will allow the County to accelerate its maintenance and replacement schedule of local roads and improve the transit service in the state's economic engine. Local roads are not simply "roads to home" but rather are main connectors of goods and services to market, such as County Highway Y (Layton Ave) or County Highway PP (Good Hope Rd). Milwaukee County's roads are the in the highest and densest population of taxpayers in the state and some of the most-heavily used roads in our state.

- 2) The budget should provide full funding of the state Routine Maintenance Agreement (RMA). Statewide, RMA's to counties are underfunded based on the level of service calculated by the WisDOT for the actual need for service. Full funding of the RMA demonstrates the state's commitment to necessary maintenance for the Interstate and State Highways within Milwaukee County ensuring safe travel.
- 3) Transit is a vital part of the transportation network in our urban economy, moving workers and people to jobs and education. Transit should be prioritized to remain in the transportation fund and receive increases in funding proportional to any increase in the highway and/or local road funding that this coming budget may hold.
- 4) The implementing law of the Vehicle Registration Fee (WI stats. 341.35) should be reviewed and updated to allow local governments to implement the VRF in a more equitable manner rather than a flat fee as well as include heavier vehicles in that fee as those vehicles do greatly impact the transportation network in our setting. I am convening a taskforce of public and private sector officials to offer input to you on changes to the VRF and will provide you their report when it is finalized. This will not require any funding from the state, but will provide more flexibility to local governments.
- 5) The State's investment in and commitment to the Zoo Interchange project is both impressive and necessary. Delay of the north leg should not be implemented on the most used corridor of the interstate system in Wisconsin. The movement to market of goods and services from Milwaukee County, the Fox Valley, and points north should not be delayed.
- 6) Airports and their impact on economic development are crucial both to our region and the state. The state should review its potential investments in major airports and offer further support where a return on investment will yield growth in the income and sales tax base for the state. While this is not limited to the transportation budget, leadership will be needed to realize this new expansion of the federal-state-local partnership on air service and economic development. For Mitchell International, a state commitment to a minimum revenue guarantee will ensure the first major expansion of international Trans-Atlantic air service for business and recreation in decades resulting in more air service for Wisconsin citizens to more parts of the world.

It is my hope that the state and local partnership on the transportation network can be strengthened and improved in this coming state budget. Milwaukee County has taken tough steps to improve our local transportation network and we remain ready to engage with and partner with the Legislature, Governor, and administration officials to rebuild and strengthen our transportation network in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your leadership and I remain open to be of service to improving our transportation network in our region and state.

Sincerely,



CHRIS ABELE  
Milwaukee County Executive

cc: Assembly Speaker Robin Vos  
Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca  
Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald  
Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling  
Members, Milwaukee County Legislative Delegation  
Governor Scott Walker