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Transportation Budget Brings Much-Needed Scrutiny to Questionable Highway Projects Groups Applaud JFC Motion to Audit WisDOT Traffic Forecasts, Call for Stop to Wasteful Projects

MADISON - The legislature's Joint Finance Committee has taken a decisive step towards profoundly reforming Wisconsin's transportation spending priorities. As part of the JFC's budget motion approved today, legislators are calling for an audit of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's State Highway Program, and of WisDOT's shaky traffic projections that have led to billions of dollars spent on questionable highway expansion projects over the past decade and a half.

"We just can't afford to keep repeating the mistakes that got us into this year's budget mess," said **Peter Skopec, WISPIRG Director**. "For years, we've wasted billions of dollars on highway expansions based on inflated traffic forecasts, and our existing infrastructure has been left to crumble as a result. This audit brings unprecedented and much-needed scrutiny to WisDOT's highway expansion plans and the methods used to justify billion-dollar projects. This is a crucial first step towards more responsible transportation spending and planning in Wisconsin."

Given the agency's track record of over-projecting future traffic to justify highway widening, WISPIRG, Sierra Club and 1000 Friends of Wisconsin are calling on legislators to not break ground on new highway expansion projects until the proposed audit is completed. The groups [recently found](#) that by scaling back four such questionable highway expansion projects, the state could save taxpayers nearly \$500 million in the coming biennium.

"We applaud that legislators are bringing this crucial scrutiny to transportation planning and spending," said **Elizabeth Ward, Sierra Club John Muir Chapter**. "Legislators should take the logical next step: Before breaking ground on new highway expansion projects, we should wait to see the audit's results. We should be sure to invest our limited transportation funds in only the most critical priorities while looking for savings wherever possible."

The JFC also chose not to give the go-ahead to the proposed \$850 million expansion of I-94 between the Zoo and Marquette Interchanges. Contrary to WisDOT's projections, traffic along that stretch of road has been declining according to the Department's own traffic counts, calling into question the justification for costly lane additions. WISPIRG, Sierra Club and 1000 Friends had called for a stop to that project, and are urging re-investment in Wisconsin's crumbling local roads and transit infrastructure.

“Over the last two years, 1000 Friends and other groups have been calling on WisDOT to ensure that their traffic projections are based in reality - and this measure will achieve that,” **said Ash Anandanarayanan of land use group 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.** “We applaud the JFC for this far-sighted and responsible provision. We urge the legislature to subject any projects currently enumerated in the state highway majors program in this biennium to the same evaluation, before being allowed to go ahead.”

In May, a [Federal Court ruled](#) that Wisconsin would receive no federal funding to expand Highway 23 between Fond du Lac and Plymouth because WisDOT had used inaccurate traffic projections to justify that \$146 million expansion.

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***1000 Friends of Wisconsin** advocates and promotes uses of land, water and air that shape healthy communities where people want to live, work, and play. Our work focuses on helping communities make the connection between our everyday land use and transportation decisions and our state’s economic, environmental and cultural health.*

***The Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG)**, is a state-wide, non-partisan advocate for the public interest. WISPIRG works to protect consumers and promote good government. We investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public, and offer meaningful opportunities for civic participation.*

*Founded in 1892 by John Muir, **the Sierra Club** is America’s oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club’s mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.*