



Coalition for More Responsible Transportation (CMRT)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2015

CONTACT:

Peter Skopec, WISPIRG Director

peter@wispirg.org, (847) 687-7229

Juan Carlos Ruiz, LULAC/Cleaner Milwaukee Coalition

juancarlosruiz4@gmail.com, (414) 758-0600

Statewide Coalition, Officials Call for Responsible Transportation Budget, Oppose I-94 Expansion

Ahead of Budget Vote, Coalition Calls for Local Infrastructure Fixes, Not I-94 Boondoggle

MILWAUKEE -- A statewide coalition of 25 groups is calling for a responsible transportation budget that cuts waste on questionable highway expansions as the legislature's Joint Finance Committee prepares to present a transportation budget deal this week. At a Monday press conference, the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation (CMRT) advocated instead for investment in infrastructure maintenance and more cost-effective local options, including better public transit. The groups highlighted the proposed expansion of I-94 between 16th and 70th Streets in Milwaukee as a boondoggle that, if given the go-ahead by state leaders, would drive up debt and [divert resources away from much-needed local infrastructure improvements](#).

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is proposing to unnecessarily add lanes to a 3.5-mile stretch of I-94, at an expected cost of \$850 million. WisDOT has projected strong increases in traffic along I-94 to justify this highway expansion, but [recent traffic trends](#) make these projections [unlikely to materialize](#).

Statements from coalition members on I-94 and the state transportation budget:

"Our problems can't be fixed simply by borrowing or raising more revenue for transportation -- we have to fix our spending priorities," **said Peter Skopec, WISPIRG Director**. "The choice before state leaders is clear: Do we continue to spend billions of dollars on questionable highway expansion projects, above and beyond the cost of simply repairing these highways, and leave local infrastructure to crumble? Or do we choose to live within our means and make sure that our transportation dollars are spent in ways that actually benefit communities across Wisconsin?"

"Wisconsin needs a responsible transportation budget," **said Elizabeth Ward, Sierra Club John Muir Chapter**. "We should be sure to invest our limited transportation funds in the most critical priorities while looking for savings wherever possible. And we have to take a particularly hard look at multibillion-dollar investments in major highway expansion projects, especially since Wisconsinites are driving less."

"We need to recognize the economic impact of having good transportation connectivity options throughout the Milwaukee Metro area, one that connects workers and shoppers from Milwaukee to retail and employment destinations in Wauwatosa, such as the Regional Medical Center and Mayfair Mall," **said Jeff Roznowski, Alderman for Wauwatosa's 6th District**. "I call on the Wisconsin DOT and our state legislators to have a serious conversation on transportation planning, transportation costs, and transportation funding -- one that incorporates the same level of fiscal responsibility used to drive other policy and budget decisions."

"We know that people of color and people with disabilities are much more likely to depend on public transportation to get to work, school, and medical care," **said Karyn Rotker, Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU of Wisconsin.** "We need a plan that meaningfully addresses the needs of those communities, not one that just spends hundreds of millions of dollars to build bigger highways."

"Transportation options affect everyone's health -- for better or worse," **said Jeanne Hewitt, Associate Professor and Community Outreach Director of UW-M's Children's Environmental Health Sciences Core Center.** "Expansion of highways and increased number of lanes encourage reliance on cars, which pollute air and water. The resulting air pollution increases the severity of asthma, as well as causes increased rates of heart attacks, strokes and preterm birth -- all with devastating results."

"Highway spending has increased at the cost of local roads. The state has been dramatically increasing spending on highway expansion by taking away the reimbursements that had been promised to communities for local road repair," **said Steve Hiniker, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.** "Every journey begins and ends on a local road. We need to make sure that those roads are safe, and a responsible transportation budget makes the investments needed to improve local transportation needs."

Only weeks ago, 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.

The Department of Transportation has not seriously considered a less costly alternative that would repair I-94 without adding lanes, or the creation of a transit route. As a result, the current project plan fails to address fundamental needs in communities across Milwaukee County, including a failure to connect more of the region's workers to jobs and services or to maintain full access to businesses along the Interstate.

A [recent report](#) by WISPIRG, Sierra Club and 1000 Friends found that by scaling back four questionable highway expansion projects, the state could save taxpayers nearly \$500 million in the coming biennium. That report recommended using these savings to reduce the state's reliance on bonding and to reinvest in local priorities like road repair, transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure. The report also urged the legislature not to enumerate the \$850 million expansion of I-94.

The Coalition for More Responsible Transportation (CMRT) is composed of faith-based, public interest, social justice, public health, environmental and transportation advocacy groups, as well as of hundreds of concerned citizens from Milwaukee and beyond. With spending on big-ticket highway expansions skyrocketing statewide at the expense of local infrastructure investments -- and increasingly financed by heavy borrowing -- CMRT is calling for more responsible, cost-effective transportation spending that better meets local needs.