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Contacts:

Peter Skopec, WISPIRG Director, peter@wispirg.org, (847) 687-7229

Alyssa Mauk, ACLU of Wisconsin Communication Director, amauk@aclu-wi.org, (414) 272-4032 x 250

Advocates oppose I-94 expansion in Milwaukee, seek better transit options

As Gov. Evers vows to move ahead with project scrapped by Gov. Walker in 2017, groups cite ongoing concerns about racial inequity, cost and climate impact

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers and WISDOT Secretary-designee Craig Thompson [announced](#) Wednesday that the state would seek to resume plans to rebuild and expand 3.5 miles of Interstate 94 in Milwaukee. Then-Gov. Scott Walker had [cancelled](#) the billion-dollar expansion of I-94's East-West Corridor in 2017, citing high costs and community opposition to the project, including litigation by several groups concerned about racial and environmental justice.

Members of a coalition that has opposed the I-94 East-West expansion project for more than half a decade released the following statements in response:

“We are going to continue to fight against any decision that ignores the conditions and wellbeing of the people in the city of Milwaukee and surrounding areas,” **said Reverend Marilyn Miller, President of Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)**. “We will not stand by and allow the government to continue to roll over us like the cars on these proposed massive freeways. We need a comprehensive transportation strategy that will unite us and serve the greater good. We will stand together with our allies against these decisions that do not include the full humanity of this community. We ask that the needs of all the citizens in Milwaukee be addressed so that we can all have accessible transportation.”

“Gov. Walker was right to cancel the expansion of I-94 three years ago, and it’s disappointing to see the Evers administration apparently reverse course,” **said WISPIRG Director Peter Skopec**. “Adding highway lanes [rarely results in congestion relief](#). Instead, bigger roads draw more traffic and increase our dependence on cars. All this has seriously negative impacts for our communities, for the climate and for taxpayers. WISDOT should develop a plan that rebuilds I-94 without adding lanes. The administration should prioritize ‘fix-it-first’ — repairing existing infrastructure rather than green-lighting new major projects — and give Wisconsinites a wider range of high-quality, safe, low-emission options for getting around.”

“Transportation investments are a matter of environmental justice and equity for communities of color and persons with disabilities,” **said Karyn L. Rotker, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation**. “Milwaukee residents who lack personal vehicles, drivers’ licenses, or both depend upon public transportation. WisDOT must include and move forward with an alternative for

I-94 East-West that improves transit access that ensures communities of color, persons with disabilities, and other transit-dependent residents receive a fair share of the benefits of the transportation system investment.”

“This project has always been a bad idea. Moving it forward now is particularly irresponsible and harmful,” **said Elizabeth Ward, chapter director for the statewide branch of Sierra Club.** “We’re at a time with heightened awareness about structural racism in our society, and a pandemic causing economic hardship and disproportionate impacts to people of color, all while we have only ten years left to avoid a climate catastrophe. Communities of color are disproportionately impacted by our polluting, car-centered transportation system, and by highway expansions like this one. The I-94 project will double down on these negative impacts on all fronts — structural racism, the pandemic and climate change.”

“Transportation is a leading contributor to Wisconsin’s greenhouse gas emissions,” **said Deb Nemeth, executive director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.** “To consider committing more than a billion dollars to a project like this — that will put more cars on the road, divert funds away from crumbling local infrastructure, and disproportionately impact people of color — is dangerous and irresponsible. At this moment, the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change is holding public hearings about finding equitable climate solutions. Expanding I-94 East-West would run counter to the administration’s commitment to equitably reduce Wisconsin’s climate emissions.”