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Statement: State transportation budget is most harmful in a decade

Transportation advocates condemn unprecedented cuts to Milwaukee and Madison transit systems while green-lighting the unnecessary I-94 E/W highway expansion project

Governor Evers [signed the 2021-23 biennial budget](#) (2021 Wisconsin Act 58) on Thursday, which included a one-time 50% cut to the transit systems in Milwaukee and Madison over the next two years. While the shortfall in transit funding may be filled by federal COVID relief funds, it is not guaranteed. Additionally, the budget also funded the proposed \$1.1 billion I-94 highway expansion in Milwaukee. This project will have significant impacts on the region's population by creating new congestion and adding air pollution, while failing to help those who do not own a personal automobile or who are unable to drive.

Organizations from the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation (CMRT) issued the following statements:

"This transportation budget is devastating for all Wisconsinites," said **Gregg May, Transportation Policy Director at 1000 Friends of Wisconsin**. "Wisconsin cannot continue to expand highways while gutting public transportation. It is bad for the environment, bad for transit riders, and bad for Wisconsin's economic recovery. At a time when we should be making historic investments in transit to get people to jobs, we are doing the opposite. If these cuts cannot be filled with federal funds, it will lead to the largest disinvestment in public transit in a generation."

"The majority of this budget maintains the status quo, which means lead in drinking water, public lands strapped for funding, air pollution, barriers to clean energy and energy efficiency, and a transportation system that is not working for Wisconsin residents. However, the budget does even more damage than inaction. The transportation budget in particular is adding insult to injury," said **Elizabeth Ward, Chapter Director at Sierra Club - Wisconsin**. "Public transportation is critical for stopping a climate catastrophe and is an essential form of transportation that provides access to jobs, recreation and other opportunities."

"The budget signed yesterday will slash transit funding in Milwaukee by 50% and fully fund a \$1 billion, unnecessary highway expansion of I-94 (from 16th to 70th Streets). This budget is contrary to public opinion, damaging to the climate, and exposes our communities and environment to increased air and

water pollution,” said **Cheryl Nenn, Riverkeeper with Milwaukee Riverkeeper**. “We should be working toward a greener, healthier, and more climate resilient future; this budget takes us backwards.”

“The cuts to transit are a devastating blow to people of color, low-income people, the elderly, the disabled, and anyone who, for whatever reason, does not drive”, said **Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, Executive Director of Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice**. “Cutting transportation funding is short-sighted, as access to public transportation is one of the determinants of access to jobs, education, health care, and recreation, and therefore is a key driver of a robust economy. It is further short-sighted in reducing efforts to deal with climate change.”

“Wisconsin needs better public transit, not bigger highways,” said **Tony Wilkin Gibart, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates**, “The new transportation budget cuts public transit funding in Milwaukee and Madison and, instead, funds the I-94 highway expansion project which has not yet been thoroughly reviewed, updated to reflect recent data, or subject to meaningful public input. This proposal would increase our dependence on cars, add to greenhouse gas emissions, disproportionately hurt Milwaukeeans of color and cause significant harm to surrounding neighborhoods. We are disappointed that the biennial budget misses an important opportunity to prioritize climate-friendly solutions.”

“Global warming is the most important challenge of our time and no investment should be made without considering it,” said **Megan Severson, State Director for Wisconsin Environment**.

“Transportation is now the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our country, and we need a comprehensive approach to reducing transportation’s impact on the global climate crisis. We can only do this by getting people out of their cars and onto cleaner options, like public transit or a bicycle.”

“It’s clear from this latest budget that Wisconsin still has a misplaced appetite for costly, polluting and ineffective highway expansion projects,” said **Susanna Cain, Transform Transportation Associate for WISPIRG**. “COVID-19 has highlighted how stark our transportation needs truly are, especially for essential workers and low-income households without access to a car. Rather than cutting funding for public transportation and wasting money on highway boondoggles, we need to start using our taxpayer dollars more wisely by investing in public transit, walking and biking instead.”