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Blog

Wisconsin's roads crumble while difficult decisions are delayed 3/6/2018

3/6/18, [InBusiness Blog \(http://www.ibmadison.com/Blogger/Transportation-Matters/March-2018/Wisconsins-roads-crumble-while-difficult-decisions-are-delayed/\)](http://www.ibmadison.com/Blogger/Transportation-Matters/March-2018/Wisconsins-roads-crumble-while-difficult-decisions-are-delayed/) – Paralysis.

That is the only word that seems to truly sum up Wisconsin when it comes to sustainable transportation funding. There are precious few legislators from either house who don't express, in clear terms, that Wisconsin's current transportation revenue is inadequate to meet current needs, but in the end nothing changes. Well, some things change — the roads keep getting worse and the traveling public keeps getting angrier.

It's how we get there

So, after this very topic held up passage of the overall state budget for months, it ends up back on the front page again. Why? In part because the Trump administration is proposing a federal infrastructure package that would rely predominantly on the states to step up and increase their financial commitment.

This is exactly what Wisconsin has been unable or unwilling to do. Despite report after report finding the condition of Wisconsin's roads to be the worst in the Midwest and among the very worst in the entire country.

Incredibly, some state officials are now saying that the only way raise sufficient revenue in Wisconsin is to do toll roads. The ONLY way? Really?

Let's start with the fact that first Congress would have to pass, and the president sign, a federal package that lifts the current ban on tolling interstates. If that were to happen, our state Assembly and Senate would have to proactively vote to move forward on implementing tolling, and the governor would have to sign that

legislation. That's ~~Member Logan~~ <https://www.tdavisconsin.org/Member/StartPage.aspx?Site=TDA> transportation revenue increases — other than a fee on electric vehicles and hybrids — in over a decade.

If all of those things were to happen, we would have to build the tolling infrastructure. According to a study done for the Wisconsin DOT in the previous budget, this would take about four years.

To recap: All we need is an act of Congress, the Wisconsin legislature and the governor to come together and agree on a transportation revenue source, and then to hire a firm to place gantries up across the Dairy State and ... voila! Six short years later we've solved our transportation-funding situation.

So, why can't we adjust the user fees — the state gas tax and/or the vehicle registration fee — we currently have? That seems to have worked for Iowa, Michigan, Indiana, and 20-some other states over the last several years. We could even do that tomorrow if we could, um, agree.

Well, some of the same people that have opted to do nothing budget after budget are suddenly saying our needs are now so great that it would require too large of an increase in the gas tax to meet them. Some have even said a dime increase in the gas tax wouldn't be enough to fix our crumbling roads and outdated bridges.

My head is quite frankly hurting a bit trying to follow this logic. It's not that we don't have significant unmet needs. It's that our unmet needs have become so great that we must wait at least six more years and install a new system to begin addressing them. During those six years, by the way, our system will continue to deteriorate while our neighbors fulfill plans to modernize and upgrade their interstates, bridges, highways, and local roads. You see, they didn't only pass revenue increases; they also came up with plans prioritizing how to best utilize the revenue and are moving forward.

These are the same neighbors whose state highways were in vastly better condition than Wisconsin's *prior* to passing their gas tax increases, according to Wisconsin's own Legislative Audit Bureau.

Human beings can come up with some really creative excuses for not doing difficult things. This wouldn't be the first time people have told themselves the problem is too big, so let's just put it off until later. It *would* probably be the first time, however, in which that would turn out to be a good decision.

The Buzz About TDA

More and more we all realize that transportation, in all its different modes, is at the foundation of strong community and economic development. TDA exists to bring diverse transportation interests together so that decisions are made to help Wisconsin continue to be the most attractive state in the nation in which to live and work.

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