

TRANSIT Times

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Budget, Legislation Shaping Transit's Future

The recent increase in federal and state legislative activity is setting policy for Wisconsin transit that will be unparalleled for years to come – truly a year for the history books.

As always, transit systems do their best to help their constituents every day. The pending changes will help ensure that transit can offer safer, more adequate and reliable transportation to those most in need.

This edition of Transit Times addresses some of the high-profile issues in this rapidly changing arena in what is shaping up to be a busy fall.

RTA Legislation: Paving the Way

WURTA has long advocated for a comprehensive regional transit authority (RTA) plan with the funding authority necessary to remove transit from local property tax rolls. Governor Doyle's recent announcement to step up the pace to create a comprehensive RTA in Southeast Wisconsin is a welcome step forward.

Hallmarks of his proposal for a truly regional effort with local community input to establish an effective and cohesive plan include authorization for a 0.5% sales tax in Milwaukee County to fund transit.

The governor's RTA legislation efforts, as expressed in the new biennial budget and pending matters before the Legislature, will have far-reaching impact. Following are comments about how RTAs will affect some of our transit systems and, most importantly, the citizens, businesses and organizations in these communities from:

Chuck Kamp, Transit General Manager – Madison Metro Transit System:

With the passage on June 29th of RTA-enabling legislation for Dane County, local officials are beginning to work on developing a plan for regional public transportation in the



Gov. Jim Doyle set out a revised framework for establishing and funding regional transit authorities (RTAs) in Southeast Wisconsin during a news conference at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station on Sept. 8.

Madison area. There are efforts also going on at the grassroots level in support of and, naturally, in opposition to some elements of the RTA. That is the democratic process. I believe that a carefully developed RTA plan that lays out the service improvements and financial support needed has the best chance of support in a referendum (hopefully in November 2010).

Support to pass more universally applicable statewide RTA enabling legislation is also very important. In 2005, WURTA visited three RTAs in Michigan – Lansing, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo – where one of the lessons learned was “Make sure you have a back-up plan.” A statewide RTA bill could offer important flexibility features that would be attractive to all regional communities. For example, there is some concern in Dane County that the bill passed in June prescribes how the RTA board will be determined. Some valid criticism focuses on Madison having two of the nine RTA board slots (22%), yet it has well over 50% of the RTA service area population. Therefore, working on a statewide RTA bill is a MUST.

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Transit History Emerges



By Gary R. Goyke, WURTA Legislative Representative

The state budget for 2009-2011 is finished, signed into law. It is now history. The budget contained enormously important legislative changes affecting the operation, administration and funding of Wisconsin's public transportation systems.

The recently adopted state budget and our pending fall legislative sessions are creating significant advancements in and opportunity for public transportation. These historic initiatives give us many opportunities to improve, expand and redefine service.

The Legislature's Joint Finance Committee held six public hearings on the governor's budget and several additional and informative listening sessions across the state. As part of this process, 3,164 people publicly registered their opinion on the budget for more than seven weeks in front of members of the public and media while every minute was broadcast

statewide on Wisconsin Eye. Public transportation advocates participated in every one of those meetings! We helped create the positive atmosphere for change to occur.

The state's beginning \$5.7 billion budget deficit was increased in May by an additional \$1.6 billion loss of revenue, creating the largest projected deficit in Wisconsin's history. Setting out to balance the record deficits, the Legislature set sights on two important goals: 1) protect the middle class from tax increases and 2) preserve services critical to our state's day-to-day operations.

I am proud to tell you all that public transportation operations were protected and even enhanced throughout a most difficult budget process. Operating assistance was increased by 2% for budget year 2009-2010 and 3% for budget year 2010-2011. In comparison, almost every other revenue program in the state suffered cutbacks.

The regional transit authority (RTA) language included in the final budget

package enables Ashland/Bayfield, Chippewa/Eau Claire and Dane counties to create RTAs using the state sales tax as a funding source. A new separate RTA for the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) project was also created and funded by an \$18 car rental surcharge in the southeastern part of the state.

Our work is not done. Governor Doyle will be introducing a bill to help provide other local communities the opportunity to create RTAs. We are hopeful that a final KRM RTA package will pass and that Fox Valley enabling legislation is also included. These are very high priorities for us.

Since 1974 (when public transportation began operations through the support or management of local governments), there has never been another legislative year that has changed so remarkably the direction pointing to our future. Thank you, Governor Doyle. Thank you, members of the Legislature. We are ready to meet the challenges!

Budget continued from page 1

Anita Gulotta-Connelly, Managing Director – Milwaukee County Transit System:

I appreciate the efforts of the governor and key Milwaukee legislators to move forward on the critical issue of transit funding. This is of the utmost importance, as MCTS is facing severe cuts in transit services or significant fare increases both in 2010 and beyond. We are hopeful this proposal will lead to a solution that is acceptable to the community and will allow us to maintain and revitalize Milwaukee's public transportation system.

Len Brandrup, Director of Transportation – Kenosha Transit:

I am excited that the governor continues to advocate for the creation of a viable regional transit authority in Southeast Wisconsin that will have the capability to fund and operate public transit services in the region. It is clear that without dedicated funding outside the normal general revenues (funded mostly by property taxes) that are our local source of government funding we cannot grow our systems to meet the needs of the region. We need legislative support for the governor's proposal.

Anita Gulotta-Connelly and Chuck Kamp, a former WURTA chair, both served on the Special Legislative Committee on Regional Transportation Authority, which informed the two proposed bills submitted in May – Sen. Bill 205 and Assembly Bill 282 [links can be found on the WURTA website at www.wisconsintransit.org]; Len Brandrup, serves on WURTA's Legislative Committee.



ARRA Bolsters Transit in Wisconsin

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds have been allocated for Wisconsin transit systems to improve their vehicles, buildings and other equipment. This infusion of capital was urgently needed in the state, because capital funding for transit – both state and federal – has been in short supply for several years causing systems to limp along with aging buses and inadequate equipment.

The ARRA grants will provide improvements for every system in the state, from full-sized transit buses to smaller paratransit buses and vans, taxi vehicles for shared ride service and other support and maintenance vehicles. Riders will benefit from multiple ARRA-funded improvements. These include fare box systems, computerized dispatching systems, upgraded technology, and improved shelters, as well as several new building projects and facility remodeling projects. The funds should make the job of administering transit easier and foster much needed economic growth.

ARRA transit funds released for Wisconsin total \$81 million, including approximately \$20 million for Milwaukee, \$9 million for Madison; \$23 million for urbanized areas (population 50,000-200,000) and about \$20 million for systems in rural areas with population under 50,000 (see chart).

Local Efforts Help, Too

At the local level, WURTA member systems are working with each other and their local governments to better serve our citizens at a time when people are stretched financially. Measures to make riding transit simpler and less costly include two recent examples:

In a bipartisan, multi-governmental effort, the City of Waukesha, Milwaukee County and Waukesha County agreed to drop the 25-cent transfer fees between Waukesha Metro Route 1, Waukesha County 218 and Milwaukee County 10. In addition, Waukesha County dropped the zone fare on Route 10. Although not a huge move, it does reduce costs for riders who use multiple systems and was a bipartisan, multi-governmental effort. The three systems also are working to create a uniform fare box system, an initiative to which Washington and Ozaukee counties have been invited to participate.

The Janesville City Council has passed an ordinance allowing reduced-rate token purchases by private non-profit/charitable agencies. Such groups are experiencing great increases in client loads and requests for transportation assistance.

Governor's ARRA Fund Apportionment for Transit Systems (under 50k population)*

System	Value	Project Highlights
Appleton	\$1,477,900	three hybrid buses, farebox system upgrade, facility maintenance (roof replacement), passenger shelters
Beloit	\$1,375,000	Bus terminal construction, one 35-ft bus
Chippewa Falls	\$136,000	four accessible minivans
Eau Claire	\$2,035,400	four 35-ft buses, one 40-ft bus, surveillance system
Fond du Lac	\$1,240,000	four 35-ft buses
Green Bay	\$2,900,000	four 35-ft buses, surveillance/security/AVL, farebox system upgrade
Janesville	\$1,658,000	Facility upgrades, service truck replacement, 12 shelters, three each rebuilt diesel engines/transmissions, token/pass dispensing equipment.
Kenosha	\$2,467,500	five 35-ft buses, security cameras, new steel wheels for streetcars, radio tower
La Crosse	\$1,127,000	<30-ft expansion bus, passenger shelters, support vehicles
Onalaska	\$208,000	five accessible minivans, passenger shelters
Oshkosh	\$2,100,000	four 35-ft hybrid buses
Racine	\$2,540,000	three 35-ft buses, 4 light-duty hybrid buses, support vehicles, software and farebox system upgrades, ticket/pass dispensing machine
Sheboygan	\$2,060,000	five 35-ft low-floor buses, maintenance truck
Wausau	\$1,800,000	five 35-ft buses

* Source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Comings and Goings

Michael J. Branco has been named transit manager of Eau Claire Transit.



Most recently, Mike served as Transit Supervisor for the Ketchikan (Alaska) Gateway Borough, where he was responsible for the operations, budget, personnel, and performance of the borough (county) transit system, which also serves the City of Ketchikan. The native Minnesotan holds a bachelor of science degree from Southwest Minnesota State University and has completed graduate studies for a master's degree in public administration from the University of Alaska Southeast. He replaces **Gwen Larson**, Eau Claire transit manager since 2000.

Gwen's passion for transit goes beyond her work in Eau Claire, where she is credited with guiding the system

through difficult budget constraints and increasing annual ridership to a record one million-plus passengers. She has been a valued member of WURTA, serving as board chair and, most recently, legislative chair. Gwen will remain active consulting in the transit industry with her business, Larson & Associates LLC, including a contract with AdSTM to hold triennial reviews and working with Door County to help establish its first public transit system.

WURTA Director-at-large **Ron McDonald**, Transit Director of the Sheboygan Transit System, takes over as Legislative Chair through end of year.

Two new vendor reps have joined WURTA. For Gillig, **Joe Drapeau** replaces long-time WURTA supporter **Clark Ahrens**; for American Seating, **Sonny Gordon** replaces **Matt Hemmelgarn**.



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Off to Washington

WURTA Takes Mission to Federal Legislators

WURTA Federal Legislative Fly-in | Washington, D.C. October 5-7

WURTA members actively promote sufficient state and federal funding of our public transit systems. For the second time this year, a delegation of WURTA representatives traveled to the nation's Capitol to address Wisconsin's urgent transportation issues with our senators and representatives. The focus of this trip was to follow up on capital needs and get our word in on reauthorization.

Speaker of the Assembly **Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville)** discusses issues with constituents riding a **Janesville Transit System** bus earlier this year. He is one of several Wisconsin legislators who have utilized transit for "rolling town hall" meetings.



Bill Olmsted photo courtesy of the *Janesville Gazette* ©2009



www.wisconsintransit.org

for more extensive information on the state's public transportation systems and providers. The site is an excellent resource for consumers, policymakers and others interested in the transit industry. You'll also find archives of the WURTA *Transit Times*, charts on the business of transit and other useful information.