

TRANSIT Times

Inside this issue:

2

2005 Legislative Conclusions: Equity • Inclusion • Opportunity

More Section 85.21 Dollars Will Help Meet Needs of Elderly, Disabled

3

RTA First Step to 'Seamless' Transit System

More info on the Web!

4

Wisconsin Public Transportation Appreciation Day



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2+2 Funding Passes

Gov. Jim Doyle authorized a 2% increase in public transit funding for each of the next two fiscal years when he signed Wisconsin's 2006-2008 budget in July. The Joint Finance Committee had approved Doyle's recommendation for the "2 + 2" budget increase, the first adjustment for transit since 2003.

This is welcome news to state transit systems, but the amount is well short of WURTA members' request for sufficient funding to sustain adequate service to transit customers. WURTA had asked for a 3% increase in year one and a 5% increase in year two. During the current and previous biennium (2001-2005), there was little change in funding.

Gary Goyke, WURTA's legislative consultant, noted that having "so many legislators agree that the programs and services we all provide are important is a very good development. Although the additional dollars will help,

WURTA Chairman Chuck Kamp addressed more than 100 people – including Gary Goyke, WURTA's legislative consultant (left), and Wisconsin Secretary of Transportation Frank Busalacchi – who participated in WURTA's Spring Legislative Day in May. Representatives of more than a dozen state transit systems, transit unions and affiliated organizations were on hand for the event. They participated in various capacities: some answered questions at booths set up in the rotunda while others visited at least 80 legislators or their staffers. "We have built a sound foundation of support that will help us in the years ahead. The governor's staff also was on hand to say they supported us strongly," said Goyke.

unfortunately they will not be sufficient to cover the expenses in many communities."

Chuck Kamp, general manager of Valley Transit in Appleton and chairman of WURTA's executive committee, said, "We are pleased with the increase, but there needs to be a fundamental review of how public transit is funded. State funding for Valley Transit was 42% a decade ago – in 2005 it makes up 30% of our budget. This represents a drop of 12 percentage points (more than \$600,000) in the past 10 years.

see 2 + 2 Funding Passes, page 4



2005 Legislative Conclusions: Equity • Inclusion • Opportunity

By Gary R. Goyke, WURTA Legislative Consultant

On July 25, 2005 Gov. Jim Doyle signed the 2005-2007 state budget. Wisconsin will now provide a total of \$4.4 billion for transportation investments, the largest in our history.

Days later, on August 10, President George Bush signed SAFETEA-LU. This new federal reauthorization increases guaranteed funding for public transit by 46% over TEA 21.

Gov. Doyle and President Bush each stressed the economy depends on us having the most efficient, reliable transportation system in the world.

The political and legislative process these two documents went through was lengthy and difficult. I am happy to report public transportation was treated as an equitable partner. We were included in all deliberations and decisions. Core funding programs will see several revenue increases. New initiatives will begin to address service gaps to rural

communities – the elderly and disabled. The current challenges of rising fuel costs and health insurance will continue to strain many local delivery systems. The new attitudes of many decision-makers offer hope for additional resources to meet those challenges.

Transportation Secretary Frank Busalacchi and Congressman Tom Petri worked tirelessly carrying forward our concerns and needs. These two men provided the leadership to make these legislative bills happen. We owe them many thanks. They made sure public transportation was included in the final decisions. They each insisted that public transportation funds grow, that funding levels be guaranteed, and that we be given all the other tools for improved program delivery.

I believe a corner has been turned and we now clearly see tremendous opportunity to continue our mission of public service. The true story of 2005 is equity, inclusion and opportunity.

More Section 85.21 Dollars Will Help Meet Needs of Elderly, Disabled

The new state budget bill also added a much needed boost for disabled and elderly transportation programs through Section 85.21 funding.

“We’re very excited about the increase,” said Judy Lindholm, director of the Commission on Aging in Iowa County and president of the Wisconsin Rural Transit Association.

“In the recent past, we have scrimped in all kinds of ways just to meet minimal needs. I hope this will enable systems like ours to retain current programs, defray costs to riders and increase services.”

The Iowa County system will receive an additional \$10,000 for 2006 and \$20,000 for 2007 (over current funding). The \$10,000 figure is a minimum amount set by the legislature and Iowa is one of about 30 counties that fall into that category. She added that the legislature recognized the unmet needs in the community and addressed them in the budget.

Although every county will use the funds according to their needs, Lindholm foresees such program improvements as greater coordination of transportation services among

various providers.

Lindholm also is part of an ad hoc group (led by Bob Kellerman from Age Advantage) that helps counties find ways to fund their required 20% in matching dollars. They also advise counties on innovative and appropriate use of state monies as designated by the legislature.

With more 85.21 money available, she said, her organization might be able to look at offering more services. “Instead of just taking people to the doctor, maybe we can help them visit loved ones in the nursing home.”

RTA First Step to 'Seamless' Transit System

Rep. Jeff Stone (R – Greendale) envisions a future where Southeast Wisconsin residents can use transit “seamlessly” to get to work, to shop and to spend leisure time.

Stone proposed the bill, now authorized in the latest biennial budget, to authorize the state to create a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) – the first in the state – for Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha. Over the next year to year-and-a-half, a study will be conducted primarily to facilitate planning and funding to extend Chicago’s Metra commuter trains. A levy of \$2 per car rental will help pay for this phase.

Ultimately, the Metra extension would connect with other area transit systems.

“The goal here is to build a modern, seamless system between commuter rail and local transit,” Stone said. “This will expand people’s ability to have easier access to jobs and strengthen the regional economy overall.”

He added that this is a model that other regions of the country are using.

Leaders in the three counties see the Metra extension as a potential boon to business up and down the line.

“This Southeast Wisconsin corridor, and Kenosha in particular, is ripe for any vehicle that will proactively support our existing employee base and bring in new employees,” said Kristie Zahn, executive director of the Kenosha Area Chamber of Commerce. “This is an extremely critical, pivotal development.”

Roger Caron, president of Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce, said the RTA was very important to keep the initial Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) planning on track. “Racine has already designed its new downtown transportation center with the idea in mind of connecting with the Metra,” he said.

Caron credited the coalition of various business groups and local governments for playing a significant role in urging the RTA through the budget process.

As for Milwaukee, Peter Beitzel, vice president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, said the Metra

Rep. Jeff Stone (R – Greendale)



would come right into the downtown Amtrak station, which will be renovated. In addition to helping create a more vibrant downtown, he added, rail travel is convenient and, if up and running by 2009, will help alleviate traffic when construction is taking place on I-94, south of the city. Beitzel noted that a significant cost advantage of bringing the Metra north is the use of existing rails.

Ken Yunker, deputy director of the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, noted that the new RTA legislation has a sharper focus than similar legislation in 1991. For one thing, this RTA focuses on only three counties, opposed to seven in the 1991 RTA; the new legislation also authorized some funding of the initial phase (rental car levy), while no funding was authorized in the earlier attempt.

“The current legislation also encourages the need to look at funding for public transit,” Yunker said.

The mandate: to identify a permanent regional source to fund the local portion of operating and capital costs – for both commuter rail and public transit systems – that are not covered by passenger fares.

“While I think the commuter rail project isn’t going to happen without addressing the local funding issues, there are real questions as to whether the transit systems will survive without funding outside of property taxes,” he said. “Major transit systems around the country have a dedicated funding source, typically a portion of the sales tax.

“We’re facing a public transit funding crisis.”

More info on the Web!

Learn more about transportation in Wisconsin on the newly expanded Web site – www.witransportation.com. This site now offers more extensive information on the state’s public transportation systems and providers. It is an excellent resource for consumers, policymakers and others interested in the transit industry.

Additions to the WURTA section of the site include archives of the WURTA *Transit Times*, charts on the business of transit and other useful information.

The goal is to increase overall awareness of what Wisconsin has to offer in public transportation and what transit systems are doing to improve both the availability and quality of that transportation.

www.witransportation.com

Wisconsin Transportation

Home

Welcome to your home page connection for Passenger Transportation Systems of Wisconsin.

2 + 2 Funding Passes

continued from page 1

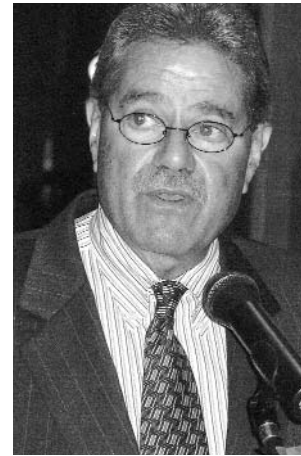
“Since this time a year ago, there’s been a 42% increase in diesel fuel costs, even more going back another year, and still rising. With a 2% increase, we certainly cannot hold on to our current services – and very likely, we will have to cut services and increase fares,” he explained.

Keith Carlson, transit manager of the La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility, faces a similar uphill budget battle, noting that state spending caps will further hinder transit funding.

“Now is not the time to be cutting back on transit funding,” he said. “More people than ever are using public transit because of record-high gas prices. We’re seeing the highest ridership in 18 years.”

Record-breaking fuel costs are causing enormous pressure on the

Frank Busalacchi, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, spoke during a ceremony in the Capitol rotunda during Spring Legislative Day on May 18, praising Wisconsin transit employees for providing 270,000 rides a day for state residents. He also cited the importance of the public transit industry to the thousands of people who have no alternate transportation to go to work, shopping, to the doctor and generally live their lives. Busalacchi has been an ardent supporter of public transit and the need to adequately fund these systems at the local, state and federal levels.



Milwaukee County Transit System, according to Managing Director Ken Warren. “The \$1 million increase in funding for 2006 will not begin to cover the higher cost of fuel from 2005 to 2006 – somewhere in the neighborhood of \$2.4 million.”

The 2% funding increase will help, but the system is still faced with possible fare increases and reduced services.

“The state is in a budget crisis,” Kamp added. “But they need to look at return on investment – a \$3 ROI for

every \$1 spent on public transit – as well as a comprehensive review of how we’re addressing aging populations, helping get people where they need to go.”



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Gov. Jim Doyle proclaimed Wednesday, May 18, 2005 as **Wisconsin Public Transportation Appreciation Day** in recognition of the tremendous benefits of public transportation. He commended the hard work and professionalism of Wisconsin’s more than 2,900 dedicated transit workers who provide vital public transportation services to citizens throughout the state.

The proclamation, held by WURTA chairman Chuck Kamp in the photo below, also noted some important facts about public transit in Wisconsin:



- Ridership has increased substantially over the past decade (currently about 95 million passenger trips annually).
- Public transit enhances mobility and economic development by connecting thousands of people with jobs, medical providers, shopping opportunities, educational institutions and other destinations.
- As the economy, number of elderly residents and overall population continue to grow, so will the need to maintain and enhance the quality of statewide public transit systems.