

# TRANSIT Times

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## WURTA Urges Legislature to Enact Visionary Funding Bill

“Fundamental long-term changes in the costs of providing transit services and the needs within our communities require a new approach to financing public transit in Wisconsin,” said Gwen Larson, chair of the Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association and transit manager of Eau Claire Transit.

To address this critical and pressing issue, WURTA is recommending state legislation – the Community Transportation Investment Act – that would support a significant increase in funding far into the future.

Transit is a good investment. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation reports that for every \$1 spent on public transportation, there is more than a \$3 return on investment (see related story on page 3).

“It is essential that the state make a long-term commitment to funding public transportation so that our transit systems can meet their immediate needs, plan for the short-term future, and provide services that allow us to shape communities that support the active, productive life Wisconsinites envision for themselves and their families,” Larson added.

Public transportation is a statewide issue affecting both urban and rural areas; there are 69 transit operations in the state, affecting people in almost every county in Wisconsin.

Transit means access for those who do not or cannot drive, and independence – the ability of citizens to remain in their homes as they age, to reduce our dependence on foreign

see **Enact Funding Bill**, page 4

## Funding Change Key to Adequate Service

*As part of its recommendation, WURTA is asking the legislature to return to a percentage formula for state transit funding based on each transit organization's operating budget.*

*Over the past decade, the state divided transit systems into three tiers, according to size, and divided the transit funding pot accordingly. The largest, Milwaukee and Madison, receive a “sum certain” amount. Within each of the other tiers, transit organizations receive a percentage of the remaining budget designated for their tier.*

*Although the legislature intended that the tiered system would eliminate funding inequities between the systems, it has only been partially effective.*

*“The State of Wisconsin has been a great partner in helping to provide transit services,” said Chuck Kamp, Chair of the WURTA Legislative Committee and the new general manager of Madison's Metro Transit. “Unfortunately, state funding under the current system has not even*

*kept pace with overall inflation, let alone the escalating costs for fuel, utilities, health care, etc.”*

*“Returning to a funding mechanism based on service costs will ensure that state investment in transit keeps pace with the realities of providing those services,” Kamp said.*

*Stable long-term state funding for transit operations – through a distribution formula based on a fixed percentage of operating costs – will:*

- allow transit systems to keep up with inflation and to restore the services that have been lost over the past five years.
- reward local communities for providing reasonable transit service expansion while discouraging service reductions.
- allow more federal funds to be utilized for capital needs, and
- encourage the expansion of transit services to unserved areas and during times when service is not available.



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## The Elections and Assertiveness

By Gary R. Goyke, WURTA Legislative Consultant

I recently participated in a series of classes on assertiveness skills. The instructor focused on a continuum which, of course, had two ends: the passive on one end; the aggressive on the other. The middle of the continuum was labeled the assertive position – the ideal spot from

which leaders/managers could properly perform their jobs.

Of course, the entire time I sat in the class, thoughts of politics and the upcoming elections nagged in the back of my mind. I know that this admission will shock many of you.

However, when we got to the sections on what happens when you reach that “assertive position,” the back of my mind and the front of my mind collided with a forceful realization that we in WURTA have successfully – maybe somewhat instinctively and perhaps unconsciously – arrived at the ideal position to assert our concerns to the legislature and the governor.

We will no longer be passive, as if it’s not our place to speak up; nor will we be aggressive, either abrasive or intimidating.

The true message of an assertive leader/manager is: you will never have to wonder what I think; I will tell you. You will never have to wonder what I feel; I will share that with you. I am a valuable and worthy person and so are you. I am not a helpless victim; I will not allow others to decide for me how I will behave. And, most importantly, I want to find a way we all can win!!

At this point in the class, while still looking intently at the instructor, I took out of my briefcase the outline for our legislative proposal, which was approved at WURTA’s annual meeting in October, and started writing notes on it:

“We will communicate to the legislature in a style that is accurate and respectful of the dignity of all the parties involved. We will encourage everyone else involved to do the same.”

After writing this, I thought, am I becoming “naïve?” Has my hip surgery affected my historic view of working with the legislative caucus budget system? The answer is no.

WURTA members have self-respect, and we genuinely respect others. We will use good rational thinking and present our ideas and concerns.

So far, so good. But what about the elections?

I wondered: if all the candidates for office today were to take a course like this – rather than candidate classes that focus on how to obliterate your opponent with the most negative thing you can possibly say – would the climate in the legislature improve dramatically?

With this in mind, I’ve been urging WURTA members to seek out and get to know those candidates who deliver a positive message. We hope to get those candidates involved in understanding the value of public transportation.

We assert that, together, we can work to pass legislation that will provide adequate transit service in Wisconsin communities far into the future.

## Transit Spot Takes APTA Grand Award



The Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Southeast Wisconsin Marketing Partnership won the American Public Transportation Association Ad Wheel Awards grand award for electronic media at APTA’s annual conference in October. The winning TV spot, part of a campaign, “The Bus – Your Other Set of Wheels,” that played on the high cost of gas as another good reason to use public transit. This is a great honor for the partnership, which includes transit systems from Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Washington, Racine and Kenosha counties. Kudos to Dave Vickman and Ingrid Koch of the WisDOT Transit Section for managing the project and the Versant advertising agency for creating the spot. The campaign also included radio and direct mail, as well as a Cost Calculator to compare monthly costs of driving vs. riding the bus.

See the spot and the calculator at: [www.YourOtherWheels.com](http://www.YourOtherWheels.com)

# The Case for Expanding Transit Funding

## WisDOT Study Shows How State Investment Will Reap Huge Benefits

A Wisconsin Department of Transportation study has found that public transit – with only modest investment by the state – would result in annual statewide economic benefits of \$8.58 billion by 2024.

However, with a reasonable increase in state funding (+2.5% annually), the benefits could reach \$11.8 billion a year – an 18.9% increase over a zero-percent real growth model.

In other words, every dollar invested in transit yields a return of \$3.61. The ROI varies between 6% and 6.5% over the 20-year analysis period – well above the cost of capital.

*Transit benefits always outweigh transit costs.*

On the flip side, a decrease in real state funding (-2.5% annually) would result in benefits of only \$6 billion – a 12.6% decrease compared to the no-growth scenario.

Public transportation benefits also include the ability to improve people’s mobility, reduce traffic congestion, and positively impact economic development. A vast majority of transit users in Wisconsin do not have other means of access. The lack of transportation will be detrimental to quality of life and economic productivity, according to the researchers.

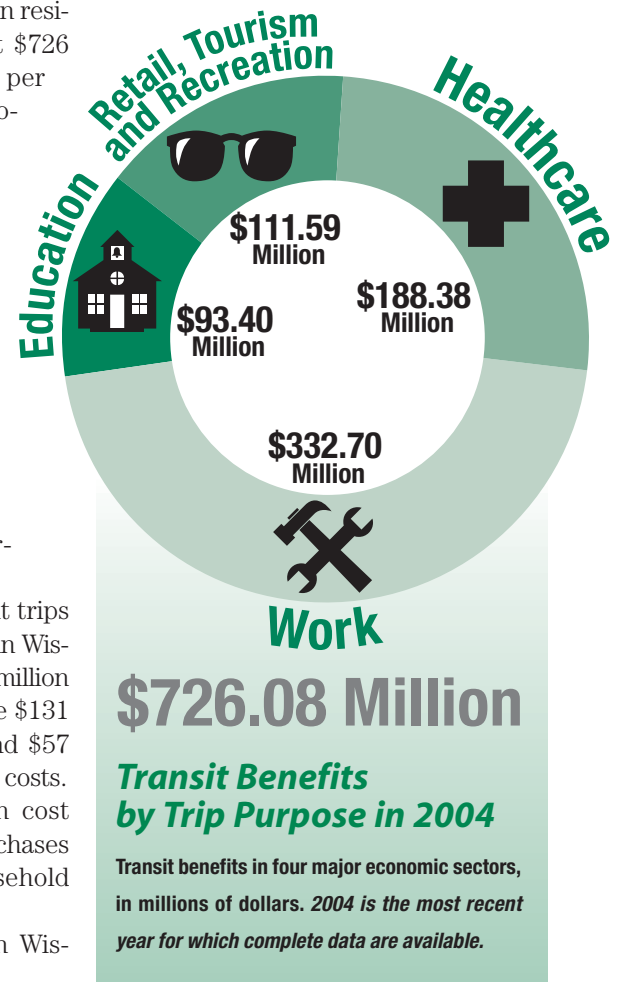
The transit benefits to Wisconsin residents in 2004 were estimated at \$726 million (see graphic), or \$7.59 per passenger trip in the major economic sectors – healthcare; work; education; and retail, tourism and recreation.

In the Milwaukee system, for example, public transit produced a benefit of approximately \$111.69 million in 2004. The figure represents savings in vehicle ownership and operating cost, travel time, accidents and environmental emissions due to less congestion, and fewer miles traveled by personal vehicles.

An estimated 9.7 million transit trips are made for healthcare purposes in Wisconsin annually, resulting in \$188 million in cost savings. Transit riders save \$131 million in transportation costs and \$57 million is saved in home healthcare costs.

In turn, riders’ transportation cost savings are redirected toward purchases in housing, food and other household expenditures.

Clearly, investing in transit in Wisconsin is economically worthwhile.



Visit [www.wisconsintransit.org](http://www.wisconsintransit.org) for a link to the full WisDOT report.



State Rep. Louis Molepske Jr., (pictured, right) held office hours on an August afternoon while riding a Stevens Point city bus to discuss the concerns of local citizens as he spotlighted the role of public transportation. Many of the riders told him that the bus is their only form of transportation. “Without the bus system, it would leave a lot of people without transportation,” Molepske told the *Stevens Point Journal*. He also talked about transit funding, explaining that federal legislation is sometimes proposed to cut funding for programs such as the city bus. Molepske, a Democrat, represents the 71st Assembly District and serves on the Senate Committee on Transportation.

Photo: DOUG WOJCIK/Stevens Point Journal © 2006 (used with permission)

## Enact Funding Bill

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oil, and to create communities where transit is a real alternative to driving.

“Funding constraints have made it difficult for us to maintain existing services, much less expand to meet increased demand,” explained Greg Seubert, transit director for the Wausau Area Transit System and a member of the WURTA Legislative Committee. “For example, Wausau has reduced disabled transportation service levels by 50% over the past five years to reduce cost. While service cuts have achieved the desired budget objective, they have diminished the quality of life for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.”

Transit supports economic growth and vitality in our communities by allowing people to get to jobs, stores, medical facilities, recreation and other businesses. Without adequate public transit, it will become increasingly difficult for communities and the state to compete, both regionally and nationally.

### The State of Transit Funding

*The Legislative Reference Bureau reports that in 1994 the state covered 43.4% of transit system operating costs throughout Wisconsin. By 2005, that had fallen to 38% – and will be even lower in 2006/07.*

*WURTA’s proposed bill would provide state investment equal to 44% of operating costs for all Wisconsin transit systems as part of the 2008/09 biennial budget, increasing to 47% in 2010/11 and 49% in 2012/13\*.*

*In addition, the bill would expand the state’s responsibility for matching funds for new capital projects to 10% of the total project cost for all current transit operations and 15% for service in new areas.*

**\* Visit [www.wisconsintransit.org](http://www.wisconsintransit.org) to view WURTA’s complete recommendation.**

**Neal Kedzie (R)**, 11th Assembly District, assistant majority leader and chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, met with WURTA representatives in Waukesha Sept. 19th for a briefing on the state’s transit industry and funding issues. Kedzie (second from right) is pictured here with (from left) **Anita Gulotta-Connelly**, director of administration for the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS); **Robert Johnson**, transit director for Waukesha Metro Transit; and **Joe Caruso**, marketing director for MCTS. The WURTA members presented information about the history of transit funding and its impact, described the operating characteristics of the state’s largest transit system (Milwaukee), and discussed performance statistics for Wisconsin transit based on state audits.



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[www.wisconsintransit.org](http://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.