

# TRANSIT

*Times*

**Executive  
Report  
2008**



## Revitalizing Transit Essential to Economy

Welcome to the annual Executive Report issue of the *WURTA Transit Times*. On behalf of all of the members of the Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association, **THANK YOU** for taking the time to read the critical information it contains on the status and needs of public

transportation operators and the thousands of citizens across Wisconsin who rely on our services each and every day.

The success of public transit in our state comes as the result of a longstanding partnership between federal, state and local governments and the transit operators across the state. Maintaining and growing this vital service for the citizens of Wisconsin requires all of the best efforts of this partnership as we strive to provide mobility and access to jobs, job training, education, medical and social services and the life of our communities to people in urban and rural areas throughout our state.

Providing reliable and economical transit services requires a mix of adequate and timely capital funding to purchase equipment and construct facilities that deliver and support the delivery of transit services to our citizens, as well as sufficient operating funds to make those services a reality at the times and in the places that people need them. Transit is now a regional service, and the future of transit in Wisconsin will require a regional approach, with oversight, management and funding provided on the same basis.

With increasingly restricted finances at all levels of government, it's important to remember that **investment** in public transit has been shown time and again to return benefits to the economy of over three times the amount invested. At a time when all levels of government are seeking ways to stimulate the economy, provide jobs and compete in the global economy of the 21st century, it's well to remember that an investment in public transit now will help Wisconsin achieve all of those goals and return far more than what is spent.

The following pages will lay out WURTA's recommendations for the programs and investments necessary to maintain and expand this critical service for the people who rely on public transit daily and the thousands more who need transit services that do not yet exist. Please consider the benefits of these proposals and the advantages to Wisconsin that their implementation will bring. **THANK YOU** for your interest and support.

Dave Mumma  
Chairperson

## Shaping the Future: Federal and State Funding Priorities

Public transportation is facing a crisis of unequalled proportions as demand rises, but funding lags behind need.

When it comes to public transit, neither state nor federal efforts work in a vacuum. In fact, the two funding sources create an intricate balance. In a perfect world, each would contribute adequate amounts to provide safe, reliable and essential service wherever it is needed.

However, over the past decade, there's been a shift that has created a funding imbalance that has slowly eroded our systems as capital budgets are moved to cover operations.

Historically, Wisconsin has been a major financial backer of public transit service in the state. Sadly, over the past 10 years, the state's contributions under the Section 85.20 Operating Assistance program have dwindled by as much as 15%

*continued on page 2*



**The Decline in State Transit Operations Support** Over the past 12 years, critical support of transit operations from the state Transportation Fund has declined both in percentage of expenses covered and purchasing power for essential operating costs. This graph depicts the funding of "Tier B" systems (in cities with populations of 50,000-200,000). However, the state's largest systems have also suffered the loss of purchasing power from state funds, forcing financially strapped local governments to pick up the slack.

SHAPING THE FUTURE continued from front

of system operating expenses. A decade ago, the state share of operating expenses for Tier B systems was 42%; now it's just 27%.

But, as transit operating aids under Sections 5307 and 5311 of the Federal Transit Act increased in the same time frame, the state decreased its share. Furthermore, the State of Wisconsin does not contribute to capital costs.

In Milwaukee, state funding increased slightly in recent years, but has not kept pace with significant increases in fuel and other operating costs, which were left to the county to cover. In Madison, state funding has remained at a nearly constant dollar amount, but expenses covered by state assistance have fallen from 42% to 34% during the period. A \$4 million loss in purchasing power has had to be made up by the city at a time when pressures on shared revenue payments and limits on local property tax levies make the funding of such increases problematic.

To survive, state transit systems have used a greater proportion of their federal formula funding – designated for either operating or capital expenses – to cover operating costs. In effect, this has made federal transit capital funding scarce for the past several years.

The negative impact on transit systems has been particularly harsh in the face of rising fuel, insurance and labor costs, as well as decreases in state shared revenues and levy limits on local governments. Most transit systems have raised fares drastically and/or cut service at a time when our customers can ill afford it.

For the sake of riders throughout Wisconsin, WURTA members pledge to work with our state legislators to return the state's commitment to transit funding to historic levels.

# Protect Tier B Systems Against Census Creep

We strongly support proposed legislation to maintain federal transit operating assistance for small urban systems with populations over 200,000 that operate fewer than 100 buses, known nationally as the "100 Bus Coalition."

At least two Wisconsin urbanized areas – Appleton and Green Bay – will exceed the 200,000 population threshold in the next census, joining several other urbanized areas in Wisconsin – Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties and the cities of Waukesha, Sun Prairie and Stoughton.

Under current regulations, they will lose federal operating funds under Section 5307 of the Federal Transit Act, which currently underwrites approximately 32% of operating costs for these and other systems in "Tier B" of the WisDOT funding structure.

Wisconsin state law mandates that all Tier B systems be funded equally; so the loss of Section 5307 assistance to these two systems will have a domino effect across the state, as the remaining Tier B systems' state aid is shifted to balance lost federal operating funds. Passage of the proposed "100 Bus Coalition" plan would allow these cities, as well as those already in this situation, to qualify for the benefits of continued federal operating assistance.

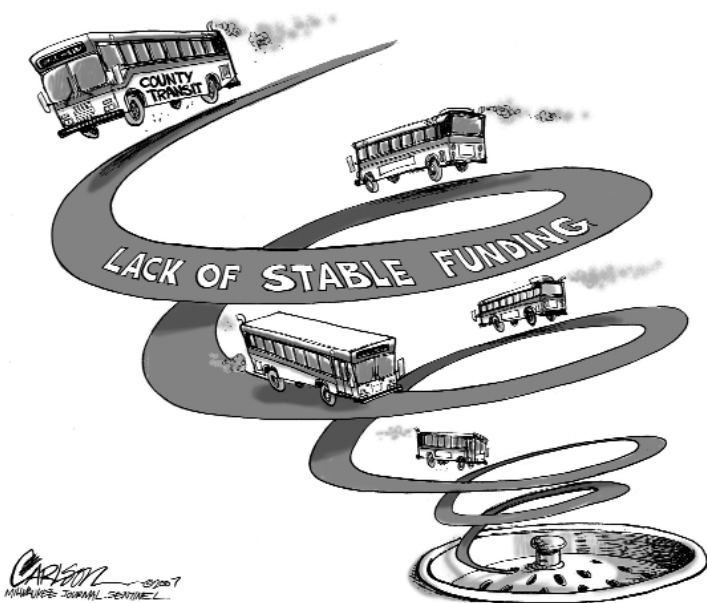
# Boost SAFETEA-LU

Reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program known as SAFETEA-LU – (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users) must provide additional funding for transit systems. The current authorization expires in 2009.

Additional funding is imperative in an era of skyrocketing fuel prices, increasing congestion on our roads, and the aging of our population, all leading to unprecedented demand for public transportation. As Wisconsin and the nation seek green solutions to urban sustainability, a robustly funded program to develop and expand public transit as an integral part of our national infrastructure is crucial for our continued growth and global competitiveness throughout the 21st century.

Failure to ensure adequate replacement legislation for this critical piece of the national transportation program would literally cripple not only transit, but our national economy.

WURTA is committed to working with our transportation partners on the statewide and national levels, as well as the Wisconsin Congressional delegation, to develop proposals and strategies to ensure the future viability and solvency of the entire surface transportation industry nationally and in Wisconsin.



**STUART CARLSON'S EDITORIAL CARTOON** from the Feb. 16, 2007 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* represents the future of public transit, not only in Milwaukee County, but throughout the state unless adequate funding is restored.

© 2007 Journal Sentinel Inc., reproduced with permission

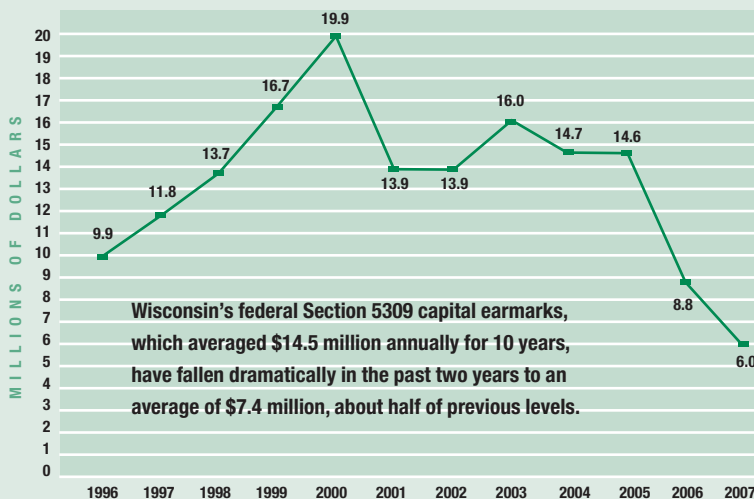
# When is 'Earmark' Not a Dirty Word?

Wisconsin earmarks buy buses, build transfer centers and provide maintenance facilities – capital items that are essential to the continued provision of adequate transit services. With WURTA's support, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) has reviewed, consolidated and submitted to our congressional delegation a combined and coordinated request since 1993.

The overall success of this program proves that rational, orderly planning and funding can be achieved through a single statewide earmark of federal Section 5309 discretionary capital funds. This unified approach is the best solution to meeting our members' capital needs, instead of individual cities or congressional districts "going it alone." But for this system to work over time, on-going funding levels must be sufficient to continue the viability of our transit infrastructure and maintain quality service delivery at reasonable cost in all Wisconsin systems. This will help Wisconsin recover from the steep reduction in federal capital dollars in recent years (averaging less than 50% of historic annual funding) that has caused the critical backlog of unmet capital needs in systems of all sizes.

While WURTA and WisDOT support the principle of a fair and equitable formula distribution of federal capital funds by FTA, such a system does not currently exist. In addition, Wisconsin fares poorly when pitted against the huge metropolitan areas and states with large congressional delegations in the FTA distribution process.

Without a significant increase in funding from recent levels, transit systems will be forced – year after year – to "stretch" the lifespan of aging vehicles and facilities well beyond FTA standards. The resulting inefficiencies require a disproportionate amount of operating funds to be spent on maintenance rather than providing service to citizens.



**SQUEEZING BY** – One of Eau Claire Transit's university route buses cannot pull all the way into the bus lane at the outdated Transfer Center. Because of the close quarters, one bus is forced to load/unload passengers mid-lane. A "temporary" structure built in 1985, the Transfer Center is literally falling apart, has no public restrooms and inadequate heating. The city planned to replace the Center in 2004, but the project has been repeatedly delayed by the lack of federal funding.



**MECHANICAL "SENIOR CITIZENS"** – Green Bay Metro still has in service six 1982 GMC New Look buses like this one – once the "industry standard," now a dinosaur. Each has racked up 150,000-200,000 miles after major rebuilds. The fleet also includes six 1986 Flexible Metro buses with 550,000-600,000 service miles. Neither model has air conditioning and parts are hard to come by. Three expensive-to-operate 1999 Dupont Trolleys round out the list of 15 vehicles in dire need of replacement. In total, 24 vehicles have exceeded their FTA-ranked useful life and are eligible for replacement.



**CLOSE QUARTERS** – When the Janesville Transit System bus garage opened in 1961, the system operated 18 small 27-foot buses. Nearly half a century later, the garage cannot accommodate today's 21-bus fleet of 35- and 40-footers, and those inside are packed together in extremely close quarters. To avoid collisions with other parked vehicles, this arrangement requires a driver and ground guide each time a bus is moved in or out of the facility.

