



WURTA Legislative Agenda 2009

Federal Priorities

- **Putting ARRA Funding to Work in Wisconsin:** WURTA and its members deeply appreciate the additional transit capital funding provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which will help us address some of the current backlog of transit capital projects in the state. We pledge to make the maximum effort to put the funding to work in Wisconsin as quickly as program requirements can be met and projects brought on-line. Transit systems are already working in close coordination with the Federal Transit Administration, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and the Governor's Office of Recovery and Reinvestment to make certain that every dollar allocated to Wisconsin under this program is utilized to provide improved transit services for Wisconsin's citizens.
- **Surface Transportation Program Reauthorization:** The timing for action on the re-authorization of the Federal Surface Transportation Program has reached the critical point. With SAFTEA-LU set to expire on September 30, 2009, just six months from now, WURTA and its members anxiously look toward the enactment of a comprehensive, innovative and robustly funded plan that will take our national surface transportation system and public transit in particular, into the second decade of the 21st century.

WURTA believes that it is imperative that the federal reauthorization provide additional capital and operating funding for transit systems, backed-up by sustainable revenue sources, during this era of increasing congestion on our roads and highways, the need to connect citizens with jobs, education and services to re-invigorate our economy, and to address the aging of our population—all of which have led to unprecedented demand for public transportation.

As Wisconsin and the nation look for green solutions to urban sustainability, a vigorously funded program to develop and expand public transit services to be capable of accommodating 10% of the

trips in our urban areas as an integral part of our national infrastructure is crucial for our continued growth and global competitiveness throughout the 21st century.

Finally, transit funding formulas should be revised so that Wisconsin receives a more equitable share. Wisconsin accounts for 2% of the nation's population but receives less than 1% of the nation's transit funding.

- o **The 100 Bus Coalition:** Within the reauthorization effort, WURTA strongly supports proposed legislation that seeks to maintain, and in certain cases in Wisconsin, restore federal transit operating assistance for small urban systems whose populations exceed 200,000 but which operate fewer than 100 vehicles. Nationally, this effort has been called the "100 Bus Coalition." With the upcoming 2010 census and its impact on several areas in Wisconsin, this becomes a priority issue to maintain and grow transit services in these areas.

- o Rescind Proposed Change to the "School Tripper" Rule: Under Federal Transit Administration administrative rules (49CFR Part 605), Transit systems are prohibited from providing "exclusive school bus service" as a condition of receiving federal transit funding. However, current rules, in effect since the 1970's, allow transit systems to provide "school tripper" routes to match the travel times and patterns of students, so long as they are published and open to the general public, the regular fares are charged, etc.

As the result of a federal court decision in 2007 liberalizing the interpretation of the FTA "School Tripper rule" in one area of New York State, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has proposed to change the current rule for the rest of the country to effectively abolish "school trippers." Transit systems would be limited to operating "regular" bus routes – those that run year-round with only very minor and ineffective modifications for serving students. As a consequence, ride times for students will be longer, since routes will be far less direct; and neighborhoods and schools not served by "regular" bus routes may lose transit service entirely.

This rule change will create considerable inconvenience for student passengers. It will also increase costs for transit systems and local taxpayers, while reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of transit

services. WURTA seeks your assistance in rescinding the proposed FTA rule change.

- **Statewide Discretionary Capital Grant:** WURTA supports one statewide grant of federal Section 5309 discretionary capital funds, sufficient to meet the needs of all Wisconsin transit systems, as a continuing federal priority. As a result of controversy over the earmarking process, Wisconsin has suffered a steep reduction in federal capital dollars in recent years, averaging less than 50% of historic annual funding levels. This has led to a critical backlog of unmet capital needs in systems of all sizes throughout the state; and interrupted a rational, orderly cycle of planning and funding capital acquisitions.

While recent funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will help Wisconsin transit systems catch up on a number of much needed capital acquisitions, the ARRA by itself will not erase all needs, and it does not establish a predictable annual funding source that will provide stable support for transit capital needs. WURTA asserts that Wisconsin's combined capital request will meet all requirements for directed funding established by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for the current Congress.

State Priorities

- **Regional Transit Authorities (RTA's):** WURTA strongly supports the creation of the statutory authority necessary to establish regional transit authorities in Wisconsin, along with the funding authority necessary to remove transit from the local property tax. We also maintain that local community input must be considered when forming an RTA. This is carried out by maximizing local control over the process of determining, establishing, operating and funding RTA's by the local units of government who know best what their areas need; with a minimum of mandates imposed from above.

WURTA supports the following inclusions in proposed RTA legislation:

1. Ensuring that counties and municipalities work cooperatively when forming an RTA within each other's jurisdictions so that so that neither could exclude the other.

2. Ensure that existing public transportation providers and systems in a region developing an RTA are given the opportunity to participate in the RTA once formed.
 3. Ability to implement up to a \$0.005 sales tax specifically for RTA operations.
 4. Optional referendums – locally determined as countywide or by each individual participating municipality.
 5. Ability to develop multi-county RTA's, or to contract to provide service outside the RTA boundaries, including portions of urbanized areas that cross county or state lines, for public transportation services. Existing bi-lateral service contracts must be considered when developing an RTA.
- o **State Operating Assistance:** The State of Wisconsin has and continues to be a major supporter of public transit service. Unfortunately, over the past 10 years, the percentage of transit system operating costs covered by the state has declined dramatically. For example, just over ten years ago, the state share of operating expenses for Tier B systems (cities of 50,000 – 200,000 population) was 42%. In 2008, the state's share was just 27%.

In Milwaukee, even though state funding has increased slightly in recent years, the additional funding has not kept pace with the significant increases in fuel and other operating costs, leaving the local area struggling to make up the difference. Madison's story shows that even though state funding has remained at a nearly constant dollar amount, the percentage of expenses covered by state assistance has fallen from 42% to 34% during the period, and a \$4 million loss of 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 preserve the long-term viability of its public transit program, the state must revive its historic commitment and increase its portion of transit funding to previous levels.