



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2011

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## STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- **State Operating Assistance:** The State continues to play a major role in providing funding for transit services across Wisconsin by dedicating revenues from the segregated transportation fund. WURTA appreciates this support and asks that it be maintained and expanded in the next biennial budget.
- **Local Funding Alternatives:** Enabling legislation allowing the creation of local or regional funding alternatives is a critical priority for WURTA. Absent the ability to establish additional local funding sources, transit will be severely diminished in many communities.
- **Maintain Previously Authorized Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs):** The 2009 Biennial Budget Act authorized the creation of RTAs in Dane County, the Chippewa Valley, and Chequamegon Bay. It also created the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SERTA) as a successor entity to what was often referred to as the KRM authority. These RTAs are progressing at a pace that is appropriate for the issues in their local communities. Recently introduced state legislation seeks to eliminate these RTAs. The right of these communities to establish RTAs should be maintained.
- **Coordination of Public Transit and Human Service Transportation:** Transportation is an essential element of many Human Service programs. The cost of that transportation must be acknowledged and adequately funded.

## DISCUSSION OF STATE ISSUES

**Operating Assistance** – Public transit is an essential component of Wisconsin’s comprehensive transportation system. The State has maintained a strong commitment to funding public transit services from the segregated transportation fund for many years. Unfortunately, over the past decade, the percentage of transit system operating costs covered by the State has declined dramatically. For small urban transit systems (operating in cities with 50,000–200,000 population), State funding has fallen from 42% to 30% of operating expenses. In Milwaukee, even though State funding has increased slightly in recent years, the additional funding has not kept pace with operating costs, leaving the local area struggling to make up the difference. For Madison, State

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funding has remained at a nearly consistent dollar amount, but the percentage of expenses covered by State assistance has fallen from 42% to 34%, creating a \$4 million deficit for the City. Municipalities have struggled in their response to this funding challenge, because during this same period, shared revenue payments have remained flat or have declined and State imposed levy limits have restricted the dedication of additional local revenues. Transit systems have had little choice but to cut transit services and implement significant passenger fare increases as a consequence. In order to maintain the integrity of Wisconsin's comprehensive transportation system and preserve the long-term viability of its public transit program, the State must continue to fund public transit from the segregated transportation fund and revive its historic commitment by increasing its portion to previous levels.

**Local Funding Alternatives** – Municipalities throughout Wisconsin have endeavored to provide area-wide transit services for many years. Local funding is leveraged with State and federal funding to create a valuable partnership for the community. This partnership represents a significant investment in the local economy and it produces family supporting jobs, along with essential basic mobility for residents. Unfortunately, regional funding mechanisms are prohibited in most of the State, so the sole source for local transit funding is the overburdened property tax. Constraints on local funding have already diminished transit services and major funding challenges lie ahead as a result of the census. Without an alternative local funding source, State imposed levy limits will force municipalities across the State to further reduce transit services and eliminate jobs. The impact on transit customers and the local economy will be considerable. In order for public transit systems to preserve existing services, and grow to meet the increasing demand of an aging population, a dedicated, stable, local funding source must be created. WURTA strongly supports legislation that would allow all regions in Wisconsin to consider and implement funding mechanisms necessary to remove transit from the local property tax.

**Existing Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs)** – Several regions were granted the authority to establish RTAs in 2009. Communities in each of these regions are working collaboratively to discuss transit alternatives and determine appropriate solutions for their area. Dane County, for example, has developed a draft RTA plan, which is currently under consideration. Local taxpayers will vote on the plan in a referendum, pursuant to the bylaws adopted by the RTA Board. The Chequamegon Bay area requires approval of each of the County Boards to move forward. WURTA strongly supports existing RTAs and opposes efforts to restrict or repeal them.

**Coordination of Public Transit and Human Service Transportation** – WURTA believes that the coordination of transportation resources, and a regional approach to providing and administering transportation services, is good public policy and is in the best interest of Wisconsin citizens. Public transit systems throughout Wisconsin have coordinated services across municipal boundaries for many years. Coordinated efforts initiated by local municipalities and counties have blurred the lines between public transit and human service transportation. These initiatives have been beneficial for users, but they have strained our limited funding resources. Transportation is an essential element for the successful execution of human service programs such as Medicaid and Family Care. Public transit can be a valuable partner in that success, but the additional demand and associated cost must be adequately funded, either directly by human service programs or through regional governance structures and stable regional funding sources for public transportation. We look forward to participating in the further development of regional transportation systems and we support the Statewide Coordination Model and the recommendations contained in the Interagency Council on Transportation Coordination (ICTC) final report. However, WURTA does not support the removal of Medicaid transportation from the coordination model and we strongly oppose transportation brokerage plans that shift transportation costs to under-funded public transit systems.