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## **New Study Finds Local Roads Crisis in Wisconsin**

### ***As State Budget Hearings Wrap Up, Groups Call on Legislators to Prioritize Fix to Local Transportation Crisis***

**MADISON** -- [A new study by 1000 Friends of Wisconsin](#) released today finds local roads in throughout Wisconsin in dismal shape. Over 42,000 miles of local roads in the state need immediate repair based on data from a Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) database (WISLR). 14% of all local roads in the state are in terrible condition – classified by the system as “failed, poor, or very poor”. Rural roads were in worse shape than urban roads, with 44% needing immediate repair, compared to 31% for urban areas. The table below shows how local roads fared by DOT region. Local roads fared the worst in the northwest, with over 45% rated less than good.

<b>WisDOT Region</b>	<b>Roads in poor condition</b>
North Central	41%
North East	32%
North West	45%
South East	32%
South West	39%

“Wisconsin’s local roads are failing because of our state’s backwards transportation spending priorities,” said **Steve Hiniker, 1000 Friends Executive Director**. “WISDOT is proposing to spend \$850 million to expand just 3.5 miles of I-94 in Milwaukee, when there are over 6000 miles of local roads in Southeast Wisconsin that need immediate repair.”

This study comes on the tail end of the Joint Finance Committee’s four public hearings throughout Wisconsin—the last hearing is scheduled tomorrow, March 25, in Reedsburg. The state legislature’s budget committee has heard calls from the public on Wisconsin’s spending priorities, including on transportation.

As budget negotiations kick-off after the public hearings are completed, some leaders are considering raising taxes or increasing the debt to pay for transportation; Governor Walker’s executive budget proposes borrowing \$1.3 billion for transportation spending, including \$1 billion in bonding for major highway construction projects over the biennium. Instead, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Public Research Group (WisPIRG), and Sierra Club have urged legislators to do the right thing for Wisconsin by focusing the state’s limited transportation funds on maintaining existing local infrastructure and on providing mobility options to more Wisconsinites.

“At this point, we shouldn’t even be talking about borrowing more, taxing more, or spending more to fix Wisconsin’s transportation infrastructure crisis,” said **Peter Skopec, WISPIRG Director**. “First, we need to get

our spending priorities straight. Our communities' roads, bridges and public transit systems are being short-changed as we continue to spend billions of dollars, from budget to budget, on unnecessary highway expansions -- so let's start by cutting waste there."

As detailed in a [2014 WISPIRG report](#), the state is currently slated to spend more than \$2.5 billion on four particularly wasteful highway expansion projects -- including the proposed expansion of I-94 in Milwaukee -- along stretches of road where traffic is declining or hardly increasing. For just over \$1 billion of those highway expansion funds, Wisconsin could implement all recommendations of the bi-partisan Transportation Policy and Finance Commission, including an increase to local road repair funding, transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure investments, and the rehabilitation of state-owned roads, for the next 10 years. For sake of comparison, the \$850 million price tag for the repair and expansion of 3.5 miles of I-94 in Milwaukee is greater than the entire annual state highway rehabilitation budget of \$792.82 million.

"The Joint Finance Committee has the opportunity to reduce the debt proposed in this budget and instead fix local roads and invest in other local transportation infrastructure across Wisconsin," said **Elizabeth Ward, Conservation Programs Coordinator for the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter**. She continued, "we are calling on the Committee to step up and make smart, sustainable funding choices that will benefit all Wisconsinites."

Without adequate state support for local transportation infrastructure, Wisconsin communities are stuck in a funding bind. Local officials are forced to use property tax dollars to make up the shortfall in local transportation funding as best they can; at the same time, state-imposed property tax levy limits prevent local governments from fully meeting these local needs. State assistance is essential for the maintenance of local transportation infrastructure.

Wisconsin's lavish spending on new highway capacity seems particularly short-sighted in light of recent changes in transportation behavior. Wisconsinites are driving less and relying more on non-driving modes of transportation such as walking, biking and transit. The average Wisconsinite today drives no more than he or she did in 1998, and overall vehicle miles travelled in 2013 -- the most recent year for which data are available from WISDOT -- were down approximately 1.5 percent from the peak level of eight years prior.

*The full analysis of the state of local roads in Wisconsin can be found at [www.1kfriends.org](http://www.1kfriends.org).*

*WISPIRG's "Fork in the Road" report on Wisconsin's transportation spending trends and misplaced priorities can be found at <http://wispirg.org/reports/wip/fork-road>.*

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***1000 Friends of Wisconsin** advocates and promotes uses of land, water and air that shape healthy communities where people want to live, work, and play. Our work focuses on helping communities make the connection between our everyday land use and transportation decisions and our state's economic, environmental and cultural health.*

***The Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG)**, is a state-wide, non-partisan advocate for the public interest. WISPIRG works to protect consumers and promote good government. We investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public, and offer meaningful opportunities for civic participation.*

*Founded in 1892 by John Muir, **the Sierra Club** is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.*