

**2015 Wisconsin Towns Association Scholarship Program Topic:**

**Why is town road investment important to economic development in Wisconsin?**

I am graduating from Oconto Falls High School in just a few days. My father, \_\_\_\_\_ has been serving on the Town Board of Abrams for more than twenty years. Because of my family's deep and lengthy involvement in our community, I have grown up with an appreciation for and understand of the importance of investing in town roads to support economic growth.

In the town of Abrams specifically, tax payer funds are set aside each year to either repave, resurface, or replace existing roadways. I feel that it is critical for the development of new businesses as well as crucial to existing businesses to have a smooth and safe roadway reaching their location so that potential customers and patrons enjoy the commute to their destination and continue to patronize those businesses.

In addition to the benefits to business economic development, smaller communities are able to attract residents from urban areas into their rural communities when those towns have invested in their roadway infrastructure. Many of these new residents have the expectation of garbage removal, city sewer systems, water, and well maintained roads. The more growth these smaller communities experience, the more tax payers they will have to contribute revenue for the continuous development of their roadways, and thereby creating more rural growth.

As cited in The White House Office of the Press Secretary Fact Sheet Press Release from January 16, 2015, "Building a 21<sup>st</sup>-century infrastructure is a critical component of the Administration's efforts to accelerate economic growth, expand opportunity, create jobs and improve the competitiveness of the American economy. As part of this effort, President Obama launched the Build America Investment Initiative in July 2014, calling on federal agencies to find new ways to increase investment in ports, roads, bridges, broadband networks, drinking water and sewer systems and other projects by facilitating partnerships between federal, state and local governments and private sector investors." Essentially, the expectation has been set at the Federal Government level that local communities must to support this effort.

In December, 2014, the Wisconsin Towns Association released a study from Local Government Institute on Local Transportation Issues and Needs. In this article, there is mention of astonishing reductions in funding over the past 20 years in the state of Wisconsin (approximately 20%).

“The Local Government Institute (LGI), which includes the Wisconsin Counties Association, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities and the Wisconsin Towns Association commissioned and released a Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance report entitled Filling the Potholes: A New Look at Funding Local Transportation in Wisconsin on Wednesday, December 10, 2014. The study was intended to look at the issues impacting the funding of local transportation budgets and develop recommendations for fixing the problem.”

“This report shows what we’ve already known, that manufacturing, farming, and trucking make up a larger share of jobs and wages than any other state except Indiana,” said Wisconsin Towns Association Executive Director Mike Koles. “In addition, strong roads boost our \$11 billion tourism industry. For Wisconsin to grow and thrive, we can’t wait any longer to invest in our infrastructure.”

Because of a lack of growth in state transportation revenues, state transportation funding could be short between \$2 billion and \$6 billion over the next 10 years. Contributing factors to the state transportation revenue reductions appear to be rises in fuel efficiency, changing of driving patterns, and a lack of substantial growth in vehicle registration fees. Towns across Wisconsin are faced with tough decisions. They must continue to support local fire departments, schools, sewer districts, roadways, and so on and are typically expected to do so with no or minimal increases in property taxes to their residents.

Every effort by state and local officials must be made to invest in the roadways in the state of Wisconsin so that the industries, farms, small businesses, and residents of this state can continue to rely on transportation and tourism as major sources in revenue.

Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/16/fact-sheet-increasing-investment-us-roads-ports-and-drinking-water-syste>

Source: <http://www.wisctowns.com/>

Source: <http://www.localgovinstitute.org/publications> (Filling Potholes)