

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

Mankind’s need for trails and roads predates the invention of the wheel. Since man has existed on the earth paths, trails and roads have allowed man to move themselves and material items from one place to another in a more efficient manner. The invention of the wheel only reinforced the need for more and better roads. Roads played an important role in the governance and growth of some of history’s most important early civilizations including the Aztecs in Mexico, Mayas in Central America and the Romans in Europe and Asia.

At the dawn of the United States of America, roads played an important role in obtaining our freedom from the British Crown and in the economic and political development of our democracy and constitution. Without adequate roads, communication between the colonies, our citizens and our early military groups would have been extremely difficult. The constitutional congress understood the economic and political value of roads and their role in communication amongst the states and their citizens and established the post offices and postal roads in the US Constitution Article I, Section 8, Clause 7.

In the State of Wisconsin, roads have played an important part in the economic and political development and stability of our territory and state. Early roads in Wisconsin were sometimes not owned by the public (Watertown Plank), but by private individuals or corporations. Access and economic problems arose with early privately owned roadways. As a result, our state moved away from private roads to primarily public roads and our legislature amended the constitution in 1871 to limit the powers of special and private laws in regards to roadway construction.

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The Wisconsin constitution established subordinate units of local government that included towns.

Town governments govern those areas of Wisconsin that are not included inside the corporate boundaries of either a city or a village. Wisconsin has 1,260 towns, including the entire County of Menominee, which is designated as a town. A traditional town government's responsibility is local road maintenance.

Beyond the political and stability importance of good roads - as shown over and over again in world, US and Wisconsin history - town roads also provide major benefits and are an enabler to Wisconsin's economic development. As of January, 2013 the Wisconsin Blue Book indicates there were 115,095 miles of roads in the State of Wisconsin with 61,979 or 53.9% being town roads. The Wisconsin Town Association indicates that 1,709,491 Wisconsinites live in a town, or 30.1% of the state's population. 95% of Wisconsin's land area is in a town.

Personal Income in Wisconsin totaled \$232.1 billion in 2012. With 30.1% of the state's population living in towns, at least **\$70 billion** of Wisconsin's personal income generation depended on having good town roads for Wisconsinites to travel to and from their homes to their place of work.

Farm industry earned income in the State of Wisconsin totaled **\$2.8 billion** in 2012. Much of this farm earned income is generated on land that is accessible only from town roads. Without investment to keep the town roads in Wisconsin in good condition this earned income could be in jeopardy in future years.

In 2012 there were nearly **15.6 million** visitors to Wisconsin's state parks, forests, trails, and recreation areas and **96.6 million** visitors to the State of Wisconsin with a financial impact of \$16.8 billion. A majority of these visitors traveled on town roads sometime during their visit to access the Wisconsin recreation areas and sites they have come to see. If the town roads traveled are not found to be in good

condition and resulted in vehicle accidents or damage, many of these visitors would think again about visiting Wisconsin in the future.

Maintaining good town roads has a direct economic impact to Wisconsin that can be conservatively estimated to have supported at least **\$75 billion** in 2012. Solid town government and investing to maintain good town roads also has "quality of life" impact that cannot be directly measured in dollars.

In the Wisconsin Territory era, historian of the frontier Fredrick Turner had the following observation on what was making the new territorial democracy work - "involved widespread citizen participation in the making of decisions affecting the common life, the development of initiative and self-reliance, and equality of economic and cultural opportunity." Investment in well maintained town roads afford the 1,709,491 Wisconsinites that live in a town to have the mobility to be involved in their communities, churches, government and to have economic and cultural opportunities that helps make Wisconsin - "The Great State of Wisconsin" !

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