

WI Towns Assoc. Essay

May 20, 2015

Our Town Roads

It can be fun to think about how your life would change if you lived in a different time period. Just recently I was pondering this idea while I walked through one of our beautiful state parks. As I climbed the rocky, steep, and heavily wooded terrain I wondered, "How did people manage to get from place to place hundreds of years ago?" Many "roads" were probably only a dusty cow path or wagon trail. Surely, going about everyday life was much more difficult. Therefore, when I think about the aspect of transportation, I am glad I live in this century. I am thankful for the roads that allow me to get to school, go shopping, and participate in numerous activities. In fact, several miles of the roads I travel daily are maintained by Wisconsin towns. The town in which I reside maintains sixty miles of road, a seemingly small portion of the 61,996 miles that Wisconsin towns collectively upkeep. Yet, each of these miles is equally important for helping Wisconsin thrive, especially in the economic realm.

A key part of any economy is the ability to transport goods, and the ability for consumers to access services. In Wisconsin, industries like agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism, and local business all rely on these concepts. Agriculture relies heavily on town roads since the majority of farms are outside of city limits. 354,000 people are employed by farms, while dairy alone contributes \$20.6 billion dollars in revenue to the state each year. This booming industry would certainly be hampered without the maintained town roads. Forestry is another important Wisconsin industry as forty-six percent of our state is covered in forests. Town roads can provide access to the forests for the lumber trucks. Likewise mining, which generates two billion dollars

in revenue for the state each year, depends on access to the remotely located stone and minerals.

Tourism and travel promote a high quality of life in Wisconsin, contributing 18.5 billion to the economy in 2014. Many popular destinations, like the state park I recently hiked in, are located off of town roads. Without them, we wouldn't be able to experience some of the most beautiful places in our state. My local town has seven park areas which people can enjoy. Almost all of them are located off of town roads.

Wisconsin's Rustic Roads Program also relies heavily on the use of town roads. These Rustic Roads carry traffic from both local residents and others from outside of our area and state. Those traveling through often infuse money into local economies in terms of gas, food, lodging and other entertainment spending. There are 669 miles of Rustic Roads traveling through 59 counties in Wisconsin. Part of this road system is located in the town that I live in.

My town is located within 30 minutes of the Twin Cities-Metropolitan area. According to statistics cited in the Town of River Falls Comprehensive Plan, 54 percent of our town population commutes to work with approximately 43 percent of them commuting to work for 30 minutes or longer to reach their place of employment. Oftentimes, I hear the snowplows traveling by on our town road at 4:00 A.M. on snowy mornings to make sure the town roads are ready for those needing to make their daily commutes into the Twin Cities area. While these people may be working in Minnesota they are bringing a portion of their paychecks home to use for mortgages, property taxes, sales tax, and everyday living expenses.

Local businesses are also an integral part of our economy and well-being. In my particular town there are approximately fifty small home-based businesses that would not be there without access via town roads. These small businesses include things like construction, excavating, woodworking, photography studios, hair salons, dog kennels and lawn care.

Our town roads are also essential for connecting people to educational opportunities which boost the economy. It takes these roads to get many children to school safely and on time. Similarly, commuting college students must use town roads to get to class. In our area we have many local residents that attend the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and the Chippewa Valley Technical College for their educations. If our roads were too rugged or not plowed in the winter, it would make it difficult for commuting students to prepare to make a positive impact on the economy. It is important that people and the economy are not set back because of transportation issues.

Road maintenance is expensive. According to a recent town newsletter it costs over \$100,000 to pave one mile of town road. Fifteen years ago this cost was approximately \$35,000/mile. Every year I notice the road postings that go up along the side of the town road that I live on to keep heavy trucks and equipment off during the spring thaw. I understand that there is a need for regulations to preserve the taxpayer's investment into our roads. In the agricultural areas of Wisconsin this might mean IoH regulations such as what my town recently implemented, or stricter road usage standards and fees in the mining areas of our state.

This road investment is essential for a growing economy. Industry, business, recreation and education all depend on these roads to keep moving forward. Without maintained town roads, Wisconsin would certainly not have the booming economy that it does. Our state would not truly be "open for business" without investment in these roads.

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