



WISCONSIN TOWNS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Town Officials

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2023-24 Legislative Priorities

1. Transportation

WTA supports a long term, sustainable, and equitable solution to growing Wisconsin's economy and ensuring public safety through road infrastructure investment across the entire state. Towns have nearly 62,000 miles, or over 53%, of Wisconsin's roads, which serve as a critical "first" and "last" mile link to the state's economy. Despite recent progress, the town road **replacement cycle** remains an unacceptable **137 years**. Well over half of town governments have abandoned road construction as a strategy. Even simple maintenance schedules do not allow for adequate preservation of the existing investment. Seal coating, for example, which should take place every 5 – 7 years, occurs every 17 years on average. Runaway inflation, which is not yet represented in this data, has increased the severity of the infrastructure challenge. 9 out of 10 towns report a greater than 20% increase in road maintenance costs and 3 out of 10 towns report a greater than 50% jump in the last five years. WTA supports:

- A. 10% increase general transportation aids (GTA).
- B. Continuing the Local Road Improvement Program–Supplemental (LRIP-S) funded at \$200 million.
- C. Funding an inventory and condition assessment of bridges less than 20 feet in length.
- D. Ongoing transfer of sales tax on auto and auto parts purchases to support the transportation fund.
 - 100% of sales tax collected from electric vehicle sales.
 - 50% of sales tax collected from auto parts and non-electric vehicle sales.
- E. Using sales taxes from electric vehicle charging stations to support the state transportation fund.
- F. Achieving equity between gas and electric vehicle contributions to the transportation fund by increasing the registration fee on electric vehicles.

2. Local Government Funding

The state and local government funding partnership that was once a Wisconsin highlight has eroded over time. When first created, 90% of the state income tax was shared with local government. Today, just 6.8% of state revenue is directed to local government. From 2001 – 2019, despite state income and sales tax growing 74.4% and 57.8%, respectively, shared revenue decreased by 11.1%. Exacerbating the dilemma, only 5.6% of shared revenue is provided to towns despite being home to 28% of the population and foundational economic industries like agriculture, wood products, tourism, and mining. The issue worsens in communities that have been left behind by an inequitable distribution system that was frozen in time two decades ago. Little rationale exists to explain why one community receives \$2.85 per capita and another receives nearly \$573 per person. This has created an unsustainable system for funding local services. It can't keep up with inflation, labor shortages,

and fast-changing economic conditions and, it continues to rely more heavily on property tax. WTA supports:

- A. Restoring the state and local government partnership and giving local governments a stake in growing the economy by tying local government revenues to the current state sales tax.
- B. Investing additional funding in local governments using a new, more equitable formula.

3. Ensuring Public Safety

The overwhelming majority of fire and EMS in Wisconsin is provided by volunteers. This system of volunteerism saves taxpayers billions of dollars; however, in many communities it is on the verge of collapse. Financial and volunteer shortages are leading to lengthy response times and even threaten the ability of local governments to continue to provide quality life-saving services at all. Deficient public safety levels are neither what Wisconsinites expect nor provide for a sound economic foundation. WTA supports:

- A. Establishing a fire and EMS aids program that helps support a basic level of service that achieves adequate response times.
- B. Allowing for towns to fund EMS using the same options available to fund fire protection under §60.55(2).
- C. Extending the current levy limit exemption for county-wide EMS service to similar regional services.
- D. Clarifying the definition of “joint EMS districts” to recognize all forms of collaboration, including districts that contract to provide EMS service to multiple municipalities.

4. Town Law Reforms

- A. Create flexibility for towns to move to an appointed clerk in the middle of an elected term.
- B. Eliminate the population threshold to pass a levy limit increase via town meeting.
- C. Modify town budget hearing notice requirements to create consistency with other required notices.
- D. Create a technical fix for determining when an unfinished town highway ceases to be a town highway under §82.19(2)(a).

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