1000 Friends Calls Report “Road Builders Wish List”

Blasts Recommendation for $6.8 Billion in New Taxes

1000 Friends of Wisconsin is dismissing the draft recommendations issued by the Transportation Finance and Policy Commission as being a one sided propaganda piece for the road building lobby. In comments to Wisconsin Transportation Secretary Mark Gottlieb, the group called for the commission to go back to the table and make recommendations based on no new taxes.

“The Transportation Finance and Policy Commission had a golden opportunity to assess the challenges of maintaining and expanding the state’s transportation network to meet 21st century needs. Instead of meeting this challenge, they found no less than 5 ways to raise more than $6.8 billion in new taxes over the next decade to continue business as usual,” said Steve Hiniker, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.

1000 Friends of Wisconsin said that the report is full of false and misleading statements that all point to the conclusion that we should raise taxes. Among the false claims:

- “Current transportation funding is provided largely by users of the system.”
  - Actually, about one half of the cost of maintaining the more than 110,000 miles of roadway in the state are paid for by local fees such as the property tax.

- We are facing “increased congestion”
  - The miles driven annually by Wisconsinites have actually decreased since 2004.
  - The report acknowledges that fact but still concludes that we need to spend more on new highways to reduce congestion.

- The report is “A Responsible Plan”
  - The commission never considered how to meet future needs without new revenues.
  - The commission never considered scaling back a single road project planned for the future.
  - The commission recommends $6.8 billion in new taxes with 80% of the increase going for 10% of the road miles in the state.
  - The commission ignores the biggest transportation funding shortfall in the state: local roads.
The commission completely ignores the challenges of a 21st century transportation system. Changes in demographics are causing changes in behavior. Both younger people and older people are driving less and using transit more, yet the commission instead assumed that we will continue the trend of the last century of increasing the miles we drive.

Freight traffic is increasing yet there is no mention of demand management systems or the cost effectiveness of improving the rail infrastructure to meet freight transport needs. The proposed solution is to simply build more roads.

“This commission is like the old story: If you have a stomach ache and see a surgeon, he will recommend surgery. In this case, we have a transportation funding problem and we asked a bunch of people closely associated with the road building industry what we should do. The not-surprising answer: ‘Give us more money to build more roads.’”

“That’s wrong for the taxpayer and it wrong for our future,” concluded Hiniker.

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