WISCONSIN’S COMMUNITIES BIG LOSERS IN BUDGET PROPOSAL

Transit riders, urban neighborhoods and local streets and rural roads are big losers in Governor Walker’s proposed biennial budget according to 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. Ironically, the cuts to urban programs come when the state’s proportion of urbanized residents is at its highest level since 1848. Fully 68% of Wisconsin’s population resides in urban areas.

The 2013-15 budget proposes the following policies and funding levels that will hurt Wisconsin’s more than 1700 communities:

Transportation

Despite statutory authority to receive up to 85% of local transportation funding reimbursed from the state’s Transportation Fund, cities and villages will get less than 19% of their costs reimbursed (while funding for major highway expansion is significantly increased.) Counties will get less than 20% of their costs reimbursed and towns will receive less than 40% of their reimbursements.

Despite a declining number of miles being driven in the state, the Transportation budget increases spending on expanding state highways. It is foolish to spend more money to expand highways when use of highways is going down.

Despite increased demand for transit, there is no increase on spending for transit needs and there are no provisions for allowing local government to raise segregated revenues for transit. This budget virtually assures that the Fox Valley Transit system will disappear and that several others may follow suit.

Transit funding is moved from the Transportation Fund to the general fund, making transit compete with essential services for funding. The Transportation Fund was established to create a fund for a balanced transportation system – not just highways. This move almost guarantees more cuts to transit, especially given the other raids to the general fund for highway expansion.

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Urban Neighborhoods
Cities, especially the state’s largest city, will be harmed substantially by removing the residency requirement. City employees tend to own houses that are worth more than the average housing stock and pay higher taxes. Cities should be like any other employer – free to put the requirements on employment that any other employer can do. By eliminating residency requirement cities will lose many solid working families to outlying areas – and the subsequent tax base.

General Revenue Raids
The proposed budget increases raids on the general fund. This amounts to roads over schools and fire and police protection. The Transportation Fund should be used to fund transportation infrastructure. If the Transportation Fund is not generating enough revenues, either DOT spending should go down or segregated transportation funds (gas tax and auto registrations) should be raised. Schools, fire, police and other essential services should not have to compete for funds to build more freeways.

“We need to invest in our communities and give them the tools and the resources to be safe, attractive and prosperous places for our current and future residents. This budget cuts both tools and aids to the places that Wisconsinites call home,” said Steve Hiniker, Executive Director 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.

“The legislature must represent the needs of our citizens – not the interests of the lobbyists who obviously had so much influence in writing this budget – and make the changes needed to help our communities,” concluded Hiniker.

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