

Job Growth Agenda for Milwaukee County and Region

County Executive Scott Walker

Taxes and Spending: Our overall tax burden is too high and we cannot tax our way to prosperity. To keep residents and employers in the county, we need to control taxes.

The County Board approved an increase in the sales tax in 1991 for "property tax relief." From 1992 until 2002, the county tax levy went up 55%. There is no guarantee that a new sales tax (for transit or the parks) would go to those areas and not to higher spending on pension and benefit costs.

At the same time, we cannot cut our way to prosperity either. Instead, I will continue to find ways to save money through innovation in three major areas: changes in our workforce, expansion of our partnerships and creative uses of our assets.

- **Workforce:** In the future, I will look to move from the status quo to increase the use of seasonal or contract employees to reduce our fringe benefit costs and put more money into services. I will look to contract out things like mowing, painting, housekeeping and other services we can directly measure for success.
- **Partnerships:** In the future, I will look to expand successful partnerships like the \$30 million capital campaign at the zoo with Zoological Society, the Starbucks at Red Arrow Park, the Coast at O'Donnell Park or Lake Park Bistro in Lake Park, the FamilyCare program to serve older adults with the state Department of Health and Human Services (and soon to serve people with disabilities) or our veterans office at the VA grounds with the federal and state governments.
- **Assets:** In the future, I will look to creative uses of our assets like the airport where we might be able to fund our transportation needs for decades through a more dynamic operation of the airport. We also are working on more housing for seniors and others with special needs as well as more interactive senior centers and parks. Previously, we used our assets to help save Midwest Airlines and the Milwaukee Public Museum.

Transit: Having a stable system to move people to and from jobs is important to a healthy economy. We can stabilize bus routes and fares if we control costs and stabilize state support of the transit system.

Cost: Transit is a regional issue. Moving to a metropolitan system that combines all four major systems in southeastern Wisconsin would reduce overhead and management costs. In addition, a new system could re-examine the excessive employee wage and benefit costs.

State Support: It was not too long ago that nearly 44% of the costs of the system were covered by the state (14% by the county tax levy). Now, that is down to 40% (14% by the county tax levy).

I have a plan to stabilize state support by using the current sales tax already collected on automobile purchases and applying the annual growth to transit. That would generate some \$100 million per budget to transit with 60% coming to the Milwaukee area – without a sales tax increase.

A version of this plan was included in the previous budget (as passed by the Assembly and Senate), but was vetoed by the Governor. I am pushing a new version in the next session of the Legislature. No version of allowing for a sales tax for transit has passed in the Senate or Assembly.

\$91.5 million: Finally, I have a plan to use all of the \$91.5 million to improve and upgrade the bus system through the use of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) technology. Some 20 other urban areas use it and have seen an average 20% increase in riders.

The BRT system would reduce travel times by some 25% through new technology. That includes new hybrid buses, off-site ticketing, interactive stations, GPS-controlled intersections and bus only lanes along major corridors. Eventually, the BRT system would extend beyond county lines to connect people to jobs throughout the region.

The money should not be diverted to a new street car system that would only cover a three mile radius in downtown Milwaukee. A new rail system would compete with the bus system for vital state and federal funding. All of the funds should go to improving and upgrading the bus system.

[The single largest factor in the ridership numbers dropping is a change made by the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Previously, MPS purchased passes for students. The transit system assumed that these passes were used for 15.9 rides per week. This change accounts for a decrease of 2.5 million in the number rides counted without reducing the number of riders.]

Privatization: When visiting with the national convention of park and recreation directors, I found that most of the great park systems contract out any thing that they can measure. With this in mind, I want to contract out mowing, painting, garbage pick up – as well as parts of golf course management. The key to success in each area is putting in place good monitors to hold the contractors accountable for their work.

I also want to expand partnerships in the parks. The Starbucks in Red Arrow Park, the Bistro in Lake Park, the Coast restaurant in O'Donnell Park, Gift of Wings in Veteran's Park are all great examples of positive partnerships. We need to do more to maximize the potential of our parks and to stretch our budget to cover key needs.

The same holds true in other areas. Only 192 of the 5,000 employees at the airport are county employees. Our senior centers are run (through a contract) by community-based organizations as well as most of our meal programs. Much of our services for people with disabilities and older adults are done by our partners outside of county government.

Much of our social service budget already includes partnerships. The Interfaith Program for Older Adults runs our senior centers. Agencies like Goodwill, Curative, Lutheran Social Services and the Medical College of Wisconsin already provide many of our services in the community.

We should be open to doing more of this as long as we can insure the quality of the service and guarantee that the costs savings are legitimate. Measurements and accountability are the key factors to success.

Economic Development: Working with the County Board, I will seek to help UWM build the new School of Engineering on the northeast quadrant of the county grounds. In addition, I have a plan to sell the current site of the mental health complex (as part of the move to St. Michael's hospital site) and am working with potential ideas for moving the Children's Court Center to the courthouse (after much talk with the Chief Judge). Such a move could also involve replacing the safety building near the courthouse as well as moving the Medical Examiner offices to the regional medical center grounds.

In the past, we used our fiscal assets to help secure GE Healthcare at the Milwaukee County Research Park (by working with the City of Wauwatosa) and Midwest Airlines at our airport (with Racine County also playing a smaller role). These are a few examples of the county using assets for economic development purposes.

We continue to move forward with selling more parcels on the Park East and we just sold off land for the gateway to The Brewery project. We also awarded a bid on 6th and State streets for a 14 story development with retail, parking and apartments.

We will continue to push growth on the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center and on the Milwaukee County Research Park. Building on the recent success of the new Crown Plaza and the past success of GE Healthcare, we look for even more expansion.

Finally, General Mitchell International Airport is a regional asset with a significant economic impact on the region. In 2007, we exceeded 7.7 million passengers and the readers of a national travel magazine ranked us as the 4th best airport in the country. In the future, we look to add a third major runway and add two new concourses.

Milwaukee 7: Milwaukee County will continue to partner with government, business and civic leaders from throughout the seven county area to move forward a combined strategy for job growth and retention, workforce development and consolidated services throughout the M7 region.