

August 4, 2008

Name  
Address  
City, WI Zip Code

Dear Name:

Transportation is an important issue in this county, region and state. I am an advocate for a strong transportation system because it helps fuel a strong economy.

A strong transportation system includes expressways built for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that can handle current and future capacity needs. It includes a dynamic airport that is appealing and accessible to passengers from throughout the region. It means an efficient and effective transit system (with stable financial support) that meets the needs of both riders and employers.

Please take a few moments to read about this vision for a strong transportation system. At the end, I explain our recent efforts to jump-start improvements to the transit system.

### **Build Expressways to Handle Future Capacity Needs**

Part of my vision for transportation includes an effective expressway system. To that end, we worked with the state Department of Transportation on the Marquette Interchange. They deserve great praise for an excellent job. Now, it is time to prepare for work on building the capacity needed on the remainder of the expressway system.

We must have an expressway system that is integrated with the rest of the region. Allowing companies that are dependent on timely deliveries (like Miller Brands in Wauwatosa) to have congestion-free freeways is vital to the local economy.

### **Promote Airport as Regional Economic Asset**

A good transportation system also includes a great airport. We have that in General Mitchell International Airport. The number of passengers is up XX% from this time last year. Check with Barry – I thought he said a cabinet last week that we just it an all time high for passenger trips??? We finished the remodeling of all three concourses, the center mall area and other parts of the airport. Soon, we will redo the baggage claim. Plus, we have long-term plans for two new concourses and a third major runway.

Mitchell Airport meets more than just our transportation needs; it is also an economic engine. To the business traveler, the airport is our front door. We need to make a great first impression.

## Insure Stable Transit System for Riders and Employers

The success of the airport can help another regional transportation need: mass transit. Currently, I am working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on a plan to bid out operations of the airport. The City of Chicago already received \$1.85 billion for the Skyway Toll Bridge and they are about to do a \$3 billion deal for Midway Airport.

Estimates suggest that a long-term lease could generate \$20-25 million annually in Milwaukee. My meetings with the FAA indicate that the funds from a long-term lease ~~turn, these funds~~ could be used to provide a stable funding source for the Milwaukee County Transit System and to aid in the evolution of a metropolitan transit system (combining ours with Racine, Kenosha and Waukesha). This is a viable option for a long-term funding source for transit that needs serious exploration and one that would not require additional taxation (such as the proposed sales tax) on our businesses and citizens. A strong transit system spurs economic development and jobs creation; increasing taxes on the other hand damages our business climate and I believe will result in the loss of jobs.

I am continuing to meet with FAA officials and will take a team to Chicago next week on a fact finding mission to determine how Milwaukee County can move ahead with a similar plan.

~~Alternatively, to address funding for the system, the County Board passed a referendum question on a 1% tax increase for transit and other services. At a time when fuel and food prices are so high, enacting a \$130 million tax increase does not seem to be much of a stimulus to the local economy. In addition, the tax would put the county a full 1.5% higher than Racine and Waukesha counties — creating a tax island as well as pushing more people to Internet sales.~~

~~Plus, the promise of property tax relief from the \$130 million tax increase is hollow. In 1991, the County Board passed a .5% sales tax increase with the promise of “property tax relief.” From 1992 to 2002, the tax levy went up 55%. Limiting spending and pushing innovation provide tax relief — not more taxes.~~

## Use the \$91.5 million of Federal Funding for Real Transit Improvements

In addition to finding a stable funding source transit, I want to improve and upgrade the current bus system. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is the wave of the future. A report by the federal government concludes “think rail, use buses” and BRT fits the bill.

Our BRT system would start with two pilot lines – one running from the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center down Wisconsin Avenue and up to the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee; the other would run from Bayshore Mall over to 27<sup>th</sup> Street down to the end of the county by the Northwestern Mutual campus and the new Wheaton Franciscan Hospital in Franklin. Each line would use new, state-of-the-art, hybrid buses on bus-only

lanes with technology to and drive down travel times. Other cities have seen 30% or more passenger growth, as travel is more appealing to the non-traditional rider.

To build this system (and eventually expand to eight lines in the county and several that go beyond the county line), I would use all of the \$91.5 million remaining from the federal transit funds first approved in 1991. The opinion of the County Board is also to spend these funds on improving the bus transit system.

### Mayor's Plan Would Cost Bus System up to \$3 million

The Mayor of Milwaukee also has a plan to spend part of these funds on a similar BRT system. Unfortunately the other part would be spent on a streetcar line that would only cover a 3-mile radius in downtown Milwaukee.

For those who suggest I split the money with the Mayor, there is a larger cost to the transit system. Putting in place the Mayor's plan would result in the loss of approximately cost the bus system up to \$3 million per year in state and federal revenues. This is because the new system would divert rely on similar sources of existing state and federal funding that currently devoted to the County cover the current bus system to the streetcar line serving only a limited area in downtown Milwaukee. The loss of \$3 million in existing revenue would require the elimination of nine existing routes and segment eliminations on five other routes. Some nine routes would be cut and five others would be adjusted if the system lost \$3 million. I cannot support a plan that erodes, rather than improves our current bus system.

The Mayor's proposal does not address regional transportation need and regional economic development and job creation since it is basically a loop serving a limited area of downtown Milwaukee. We need to think broader, bigger and bolder when it comes to transportation – we must think regionally recognizing we operate in a regional economy that reaches beyond the city limits.

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### Start New Upgrades to Transit System

Instead, the region should move forward with an aggressive exciting BRT plan that enhances and supports economic activity and job creation throughout the county and region.

Earlier this year, the leader of One KC made a presentation to a meeting of the Milwaukee 7. It was very impressive to see what Kansas City is doing in their region. We did some research and found that the region does not have a rail system but they are starting a BRT system.

In June, I met with officials at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) about our BRT ideas. They pointed to Kansas City and the recent application for federal aid through

the Very Small Starts program. We are working with FTA to get quick approval of \$50 million to move forward with BRT here (regardless of the terms of the \$91.5 million).

This program may be the quickest path to providing key improvements and upgrades to the transit system. I remain committed to my belief that the entire \$91.5 million must be dedicated to regional transportation solutions and will continue to work in that direction, but quick action is required so we are aggressively pursuing this new source of federal aid for the first phases of BRT. I will keep you posted on our progress.

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The above is my vision. I do have a vision for a strong transportation system in this region. Great roads and expressways, growing airports and a stable and improved transit system are all part of our plan to build a transportation system that will grow our economy, create jobs and take us that system into the future. The continued growth of our regional and I believe statewide, economy is dependent upon it. I ask for your support as we move ahead and tThank you for taking the time to read about our that vision.

Sincerely,

Scott Walker  
Milwaukee County Executive