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MEMO TO: Wisconsin Senators and Representatives
Governor Evers

FROM: Mike Koles, WTA Executive Director
Mike Kudick, Town of Stephenson Chair
Mark Hartzheim, Town of Minocqua Chair
Dan Corbin, Town of Summit Chair
Ron Burnside, Town of Wascott Chair

DATE: May 24, 2019

RE: False Media about Town Transportation Funding

Several weeks ago the Madison based MacIver Institute issued a press release accusing town officials of being dishonest. In calling town officials liars, they cite a series of myths and twisted half-truths that were pointed out by the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA) (attached). MacIver has now doubled down on their accusation and chose to attack the WTA; the Towns of Minocqua, Wascott, Stephenson, and Summit; and claim all towns are “*gaming*” state taxpayers. Unfortunately, their misguided assault on selfless public servants is filled with a plethora of false statements, contradictions, and unreasonable suppositions. The MacIver Institute should apologize to town officials for their poorly researched attacks.

Because the accusations were so outlandish, we had planned to let it go; however, due to conversations we understand have occurred within the Capitol, we now feel compelled to respond with the facts.

1. MacIver is under the false belief that General Transportation Aid does not carry a cost share requirement. Not only do they inaccurately represent the previous WTA media release, but also state: “*There is some cost sharing involved in the first two programs [LRIP and bridge aids], but it is not required to receive GTA...*” This is simply false. The 97% of towns that receive GTA through the rate per mile formula must spend at least 15% of their transportation budget from their own revenues in order to receive the full GTA allocation.
2. Most towns spend more than the required 15%. MacIver states that the aforementioned towns received almost as much or more in aid than they spent on transportation. Again, not true. Based on the facts as reported in WisDOT Calendar Year 2017 Final GTA Calculations, only 24% of the Town of Minocqua’s transportation spending was supported by GTA; Wascott 55%; Summit 72%; and Stephenson 47%.

3. In attacking Summit, MacIver repeats their previous error and includes state and federal flood aids in their criticism, as if providing emergency funds to ensure bridge and public safety is some government subsidized boondoggle.
4. They criticize towns for spending money in one of the four categories in which expenses are reported entitled “other transportation”. MacIver claims this “...means mass transit”. The truth is that not only does “other transportation” not mean simply mass transit, but they also fail to recognize that transit funding is not used as an eligible expense to leverage state general transportation aids. Furthermore, and almost laughably, we have yet to find an abundance of transit buses and trains in Wisconsin’s towns.
5. MacIver tries to cover their false statements and contradictions by conflating multiple programs and the unreasonable supposition that only spending on construction should be considered a transportation expense. WisDOT defines construction as costs associated with items, such as, “right-of-way acquisition” and “new road construction”. In using the individual town budgets to concoct their attack, MacIver doesn’t count filling potholes and cracks, seal coating, or plowing snow as transportation costs. In their minds, the purchase of a plow truck or road grader is not for transportation. And, the gas and oil that fuels the vehicles isn’t a transportation cost either. Stop signs? No, that’s not a transportation cost. They even put forth the notion that personnel expenses, either public or contracted, do not play a role in maintaining a transportation system. Yet, they offer no clues as to where town government is supposed to find the transportation fairy that will do all of the work without the humans.

MacIver, who is either woefully misinformed or willing to purposefully spread false information, got it wrong and owes every town an apology.

Like state legislators, town officials take an oath to serve the public. This promise includes wisely investing in a safe and efficient transportation system in the best way we know how. While we can appreciate differing viewpoints on the many affairs that affect town government, we are disheartened by the fact that some have chosen to weaponize false data and attack us in order to support their political agenda. Still, we remain hopeful that Wisconsin’s Senators and Representatives will rise to the occasion, trust town officials, and finally find a long term, sustainable, and equitable fix to Wisconsin’s transportation dilemma.