

Why is town road investment important to economic development in Wisconsin?

It can be easy to overlook the importance of town roads. They are omnipresent paths directing us to school, to work, to the library, to the grocery store. Wherever we want or need to go, roads grant us the ability to arrive safely and efficiently. According to Claudia Berg from the World Economic Forum (2015), “Roads are the arteries through which the economy pulses.” They link “producers to markets, workers to jobs, students to school, and the sick to hospitals.” Because of their daily impact on our lives, investment in Wisconsin roads is necessary to economic development.

Industry relies on the delivery of goods and services. Roads are vital to this process. “Whether shipping traditional Wisconsin products—grain, milk, paper—or goods of the new economy—circuit boards, medical equipment—the state relies on a network that supports trucks, trains, ships and planes” (Wisconsin Transportation Finance and Policy Commission, 2013). The knowledge that goods can be delivered in a timely fashion is significant for businesses, especially companies that are choosing a new location or wanting to expand in a current location. Having a reliable way to ship and deliver products is necessary for productive business. Companies need to know that their products can be shipped to and from their factories or home offices, as well as be assured that employees and customers have access to buildings and store fronts. The most common method of transportation is roads. According to TRIP (2016), a national transportation safety group, “\$264 billion in goods are shipped from sites in Wisconsin and another \$236 billion in goods are shipped to sites in Wisconsin, mostly by truck.” It might be argued that town roads do not carry the volume of traffic that a state highway might; however, they do connect towns to these hubs of transportation and commerce. For instance, dairy farmers small and large need the roads to be maintained to transport crops and dairy milk into the larger

cities where most of the factories are located for processing. Town roads are a vital link for towns to have access to the larger cities, as well as to carry products necessary to the growth of the state and the nation as a whole. Quite simply, well-maintained, safe roads are critical component for industry in Wisconsin.

Though the moving of products related to industry is a visible need for investment in town roads, the human/social component is also a significant aspect of economic development. Though seemingly obvious, it's important to note: most people travel on a road to get to their place of employment. The national transportation safety group, TRIP (2016) notes that "393,428 full-time jobs in Wisconsin in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are completely dependent on the state's transportation infrastructure network." The wages of these earners (\$54.8 billion per year) and the taxes paid (\$10 billion per year) total to create a significant influence on state and local economies (TRIP, 2016). The web of interconnectedness is clear: roads bring people to their jobs, creating a source of income, which can and does get spent within the community, purchasing groceries, gas, and other daily necessities.

Industries like tourism encourage people outside the immediate community to visit local attractions, thus further developing the local economies. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (2013) notes that "tourism in Wisconsin—a \$10 billion industry—relies on transportation that is consistent and provides an enjoyable travel experience." There are the popular tourist areas like Door County, the Wisconsin Dells, Lambeau Field, and Summerfest - all well-known attractions that invite locals and outsiders to spend their time and their money at specific destinations. It's important to remember that often these tourist dollars extend beyond the most recognized attractions. With good local roads, tourists are encouraged to travel beyond

the usual, well-known destinations. They may choose to visit Cecil's Diner in Shawano for a slice of pie on the way to Lambeau Field or to picnic at the gorge at Pewit's Nest, a spectacular, out-of-the-way nature site just outside the Wisconsin Dells. Roads that are safe, well-marked, and well-maintained encourage use and are necessary for tourism. For instance, according to Jamie Cynor, City of Green Bay Engineering Technician, "Shawano County is considered the Barn Quilt Capital of Wisconsin and to get to most of those barn quilts, people have to travel rural town roads. The majority of historical and hidden landmarks are found by traveling on windy and narrow roadways." When traveling and exploring become part of the vacation instead of something to be dreaded and at best tolerated, people are more likely to plan more vacations in Wisconsin, a definite economic benefit.

In addition to supporting the business side of economic growth, investment is important for safety needs. Well maintained roads reduce the likelihood of crashes, injuries, and fatalities. TRIP (2016) notes that "driving on deficient roads costs Wisconsin motorists a total of \$6 billion annually in the form of additional vehicle operating costs, congestion-related delays and traffic crashes." Roads that lack investment cost taxpayers money both in terms of quality life and in property. For the health and safety of our residents and tourists, we need to invest in these town roads for future revenue.

Roads reflect the health of a town. Vibrant, efficient, attractive roads invite the same in reference to economic growth. If a town wants to grow its commerce, support its populations, and encourage travel, it needs to invest in its roads.

References

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