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## The Importance of Town Roads to Economic Development in Wisconsin

Living in northern Wisconsin all my life, I've become very aware of the importance of a well-maintained transportation network for traveling upon. From school to work, shopping, health care, and safety, the road system is essential to everyone's daily activities and the economy of the region. In our rural area, our local township faces the constant challenge of road building, maintenance, and upkeep within budget for not only our residents and visitors but also for the benefit of all the businesses in the locality.

A number of years ago, my father was the chairman of the Township of Prentice. The primary monthly agenda topic was and still remains – road care; surfacing and repairs, bridges and culverts, safety at railroad crossings, easement clearing, and snow removal. All the township's emergency service agreements such as fire protection, ambulance and police security rely on a well functioning transportation network. Our town board does a conscientious job of addressing all the current road issues and developing a long term planning schedule for upgrading town equipment and maintaining the roadways. They focus on specific road sections so constant improvement is always underway. All this is done within the town's annual budget, using the annual tax levy combined with the state transportation aid.

The success of the north woods economy is contingent upon the local transportation infrastructure. Factories and businesses in my area are fully dependent upon a good road system for bringing product in, for processing and timely deliver, and for disbursement of their saleable goods. While state transportation revenues decline and costs for services increase, Wisconsin needs a higher level of transportation to grow. The Wisconsin Transportation Finance and Policy Commission has reviewed this situation and the bottom line is that Wisconsin must invest in adequately providing for current and future infrastructure needs. By failing to make investments in transportation our economy could be harmed and public safety while traveling could be compromised. There will be a cost but, done efficiently, all will experience improved economic opportunities and an improved safety system by the investment into a strengthened transportation system.<sup>1</sup>

Investing in the improvement of the Wisconsin transportation system will promote economic development and reduce the cost of transporting goods. The beneficiaries are those who drive on the roads or those who make, buy or sell the things being transported because of the transportation cost savings. This translates into real income and increased asset values. Investors are far more likely to consider establishing their business in an area where they can see

that transporting their products and goods to market would not be hindered by an inadequate road system. Much care must be taken when choosing where the state applies its transportation improvement projects as investing funds in areas with little hope for economic activity would not be an efficient use of state moneys. With improvements in the infrastructure, areas may also see an increase in taxes which could then become a deterrent for companies or families to move in. Cost savings must exceed improvement cost for effectiveness in increasing favorable growth.<sup>ii</sup>

Economic growth in cities or more populated areas far exceeds the growth of business in the more rural areas. Investors are concerned not only on how well maintained the local transportation system is but they also will be looking for an area with an adequate, employable workforce and other services, such as shopping and schools. The willingness of the town or village to work with their needs will be very important. Undoubtedly the transportation system of an area will be a high consideration. If a business has a requirement involving a transportation factor of the area they are considering in order to locate there, the town then must apply the efficiency criterion and ask if the investment will lead to a net economic gain for their community. Each township must be aware that the transportation system is under their watchful eye and utmost care and constant oversight must be given to keep the roadways in top condition. Economic growth is always a top concern for a community so, while hoping to coax businesses into their area by offering the best features the business seeks, the cost factors must always be cautiously weighed on the economic scale.

A survey of the American infrastructure shows that the total federal, state and local transportation investments have fallen. Many of our roads are not able to handle the increased traffic because of over congestion, costing families more in fuel cost and lost of time. Congestion also increases the cost of transporting freight and products.<sup>iii</sup> Our current president has promised to improve the nations transportation system. Investing in the building of roads also brings forth a multitude of jobs and improvement of the nations economy as a whole. With the recent changes and policies in our government – we have seen an up swing in employment. Now is the time for the smaller townships to swing into action. As the economy improves, our best leaders must be networking with the states planning commissions in search of businesses seeking to locate in more rural areas. Rural America has much to offer; peaceful scenery, hospitable neighbors, and north woods people with a strong work ethic. With a good road system connecting business to outside markets, rural Wisconsin can't be beat.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> *Keep Wisconsin Moving: Smart Investments Measurable Results*, Report of the Wisconsin Transportation Finance and Policy Commission, January 2013

<sup>ii</sup> *Road Development to Foster Local Economic Development*, Iowa Research Online The public policy Center, University Iowa, may 1990

<sup>iii</sup> *The Economic importance of Investing in Our Infrastructure*  
Obama White House: Grow America Act: [www.dot.gov/grow-america](http://www.dot.gov/grow-america)