

Assembly Transportation Committee approves three bills aiming to save money within DOT

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The Assembly Transportation Committee has approved three bills designed to ensure spending by the Department of Transportation is “efficient and effective.”

The panel Thursday approved three measures from the so-called Road to Sustainability package authored by Rep. Joe Sanfelippo: AB 273 would offer ways for the DOT to source materials at lower cost; AB 275 would require the DOT to up the number of design-build projects in its pipeline to ensure projects are ready to go once resources are available; and AB 284 would create a discretionary merit fund to incentivize employees to look for cost-saving methods.

But two other bills in the package — which would have required municipalities to hold a referendum before imposing a new wheel tax and required the DOT in some circumstances to reject a bid if it was the only one received on a project — were pulled from consideration.

Committee Chairman Rep. Bob Kulp, R-Stratford, told WisPolitics.com that Sanfelippo asked for those measures to be removed from consideration because he felt they weren't ready.

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The three proposals that are now heading to the Assembly floor all passed 8-4 along party lines. Dems on the committee slammed the package for “restricting local government's ability to do their job” and raised concerns that new DOT Secretary Craig Thompson was not consulted in the development of the bills.

“I think that it's necessary for us to be hearing what's going on in the agency right

now and making new rules in accordance with that,” said Rep. Greta Neubauer, D-Racine.

But Sanfelippo fired back that the package had represented an attempt to implement the recommendations of a recent audit of the Department of Transportation by the Legislative Audit Bureau.

The New Berlin Republican said he agreed that the DOT needed more funding. But in light of the LAB audit, he said simply pumping more money in the department would be akin to trying to fix a leaky pipe by budgeting for a higher water bill.

“You have to pay the water bill but you also have to fix the leak. What we’re doing with these bills is fixing the leak,” he said.

See the bills:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/proposals/reg/asm/bill/ab273>

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/proposals/reg/asm/bill/ab275>

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/proposals/reg/asm/bill/ab284>