



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

September 11, 2018

Secretary Dave Ross
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Hill Farms State Office Building
4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison WI 53705

Dear Secretary Ross:

With all the recent flooding in our state, the damage to our communities and infrastructure has been traumatic. Particularly hard hit has been Northwestern Dane County and the string of communities along the Hwy. 14 Corridor – Mazomanie, Black Earth, Cross Plains and Middleton were all drastically affected.

Acknowledging the tragic flooding, we understand that the rail corridor from Mazomanie up to the Wisconsin River and now-torn down Sauk City bridge most likely sustained substantial damage from the flooding. We strongly encourage your department to re-examine the situation closely, including the lease with Wisconsin and Southern Railroad – WATCO Companies for the line from Mazomanie to the Wisconsin River for the state-owned rail corridor. If substantial funds are required to bring it back to rail corridor standards – it may well be the time to let it revert to Rails to Trails.

We believe this is the perfect opportunity for the State of Wisconsin to make a strong commitment to a recreational trail on this corridor. “The Great Dane Trail” from Middleton to the Wisconsin River could link our State Capitol with the greatest natural area of our state – Devil’s Lake. It would also allow individuals to bike from the Illinois Border to Reedsburg via the Badger State Trail to the south and the Great Dane and Sauk Trails to the north.

Why is this so important? The recreational opportunities aside, Northwestern Dane County has been left behind economically for quite some time. The economic vitality of the rest of Dane County has not quite made its way to Black Earth, Cross Plains and Mazomanie – the economic opportunity to have a major regional recreation trail come through their communities would be an amazing stimulus “shot in the arm” that these communities have been waiting for, especially now with the devastation they have suffered due to the flooding.

Our resounding belief is that now is the time that Northwest Dane County becomes a priority for economic development and a greater opportunity to thrive. Your department’s commitment to making this corridor available for a recreation trail is critical to those of us out here working together to make this happen. This is not a pipe dream. The Great Sauk Trail (with the cooperation of the railroad and your department) is up and running. With this commitment now from your department, the possibilities are endless.

We would be happy to discuss our request further. There are many other community partners, local elected officials, local municipalities and interest groups that want to see a successful recreation trail happen. We would be happy to help coordinate those conversations. The momentum keeps building – let's do the right thing for Northwestern Dane County and act now to keep it moving forward.

Sincerely,



JON ERPENBACH
State Senator
27th District



DAVE CONSIDINE
State Representative
81st District



DIANNE HESSELBEIN
State Representative
79th District

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cc: US Sen. Baldwin; US Rep. Pocan; Dane Co. Exec. Parisi, Dane Co. Board Chair Corrigan; Dane Co. Supervisor Jones; Villages of Mazomanie, Black Earth, Cross Plains, Towns of Mazomanie, Black Earth, Cross Plain, Middleton; City of Middleton; Sauk Co. Board Chair Vedro; Sauk Co. Supervisor Wenzel; Villages of Sauk City, Prairie du Sac; Chris Long, Gateway to the Driftless Region; WI & Southern Railroad-WATCO Companies