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Contacts:

Gregg May, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, gregg@1kfriends.org, (402) 707-7379

Megan Severson, Wisconsin Environment, megan@wisconsinenvironment.org, (608) 385-9946

Cheryl Nenn, Milwaukee Riverkeeper, cheryl_nenn@milwaukeekeeper.org, (414) 378-3043

Elizabeth Ward, Sierra Club Wisconsin, elizabeth.ward@sierraclub.org, (608) 445-4489

Susanna Cain, WISPIRG, susanna@wispirg.org, (630) 418-1806

Advocates applaud opportunity for public input on I-94 East-West project, but new environmental review process still needed

WisDOT commits to additional public input and data review on controversial highway expansion project with major racial inequity and climate impacts

MADISON — After calls for broader public input and a better review, WISDOT Secretary-designee Craig Thompson [announced](#) Thursday that the state plans to undertake a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Interstate 94 expansion project in Milwaukee. Until now, WisDOT was pursuing the expansion project based on data and input collected before the project's 2017 [cancellation](#) by then-Gov. Scott Walker. The additional input will provide critically needed input for state and federal transportation officials to seriously and meaningfully address environmental justice problems that have repeatedly been [raised](#).

Last week, a coalition of transportation, faith, racial justice and environmental organizations from across Wisconsin met with the Federal Highway Administration to express their concerns over the proposed I-94 expansion. They requested that the project go through a full Environmental Impact Statement process. President Joe Biden recently [set forth a vision](#) for a healthier and cleaner transportation future that will work better for all Americans. This includes doubling funding for our aging public transit systems and fixing our crumbling roads and bridges.

The coalition also hopes and expects that the supplemental EIS will cover the many outstanding concerns about the project.

Members of this coalition released the following statements:

“We are pleased that WisDOT is going to take another look at the environmental and social impacts of the reconstruction and proposed expansion of I94 (from 70th to 16th Street) as there have been some major changes since the original EIS for this project was completed over 5 years ago,” said **Cheryl Nenn with Milwaukee Riverkeeper**. “2019 was the wettest year ever in Wisconsin, and 4 of the 5 wettest years in history have occurred in the last decade. Given the significant increase proposed for impervious surfaces from highway expansion, it is imperative that we better analyze the impacts of highway runoff on water quality, flooding, and combined sewer loading from the various project alternatives, so we can better protect the environment and community.”

“Meaningful public participation that involves the communities most impacted is a hallmark of the Environmental Impact Statement process,” said **Tony Wilkin Gibart of Midwest Environmental Advocates**. “While we are encouraged by today’s announcement, we will continue to push the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to listen to community members who have serious concerns about freeway expansion.”

“I agree with the decision to take time to review a supplemental EIS, but in doing so WisDOT needs to ensure that the input includes people of color,” said **Lee Henderson-Tatum of Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)**. “It will be important that the communities most impacted have a voice in the decision making process. Looking at where we’ll be post-pandemic will impact how the decision is made as it relates to any development with I-94.”

“While we are excited to see that WisDOT is looking for additional public input, there are many outstanding concerns about this expansion that still need to be addressed,” said **Gregg May, Transportation Policy Director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin**. “WisDOT remains steadfast in their desire to expand the highway and has rejected popular alternatives that include transit. Until meaningful public participation is conducted and impacted communities are heard, we will continue to push for alternatives that are more fiscally, environmentally, and socially responsible.”

“It is encouraging that WisDOT is seeking more public input with a supplemental environmental impact statement. Now the focus must be on the right answers,” stated **Susanna Cain, Transform Transportation Associate for WISPIRG**. “Wisconsin has misspent billions of taxpayer dollars on mega highway projects for decades. All these years of disinvestment in public transportation, walking and biking infrastructure -- as well as fixing our local roads and bridges -- has created a transportation gap for Wisconsinites who don’t own a car. Major changes in our funding priorities need to be made to transform our transportation system and create more equitable, sustainable and accessible travel for everyone.”

“This is a good step toward ensuring we are making smart investments for our climate and the health of our communities across Wisconsin,” said **Megan Severson, State Director for Wisconsin Environment**. “But we must do more immediately. The transportation sector is the United States’ leading climate polluter. In order to solve this existential challenge requires rapidly transitioning to clean energy. We must get dirty vehicles off the roads by electrifying and decarbonizing passenger vehicles, shipping and freight. We must also prioritize mass transit. Doing all this is pivotal to tackling climate change, decreasing pollution and ensuring clean air.”

“We’re happy to see this development and the recognition by WisDOT that the public needs to have a key role in this process and that the old EIS is out-of-date,” said **Elizabeth Ward, Director of Sierra Club Wisconsin**, “this is an opportunity to for WisDOT to get aligned with the leadership the Biden Administration has demonstrated on recognizing the impacts of highway expansions on Communities of Color and climate change. We look forward to working with WisDOT to make sure these things are fully analyzed and taken into consideration throughout the process.”

“As people of faith that care for the planet and all life on it, we cannot stand idly by when highway expansion would lead to increased greenhouse gases, flooding, and asthma, all hurting our neighbors,” said **Terry Wiggins, Treasurer and Lead Advocate for the Interfaith Earth Network**. “We will continue to stand up for the position that I-94 should not be expanded. We could spend the same amount of money to rebuild the highway and improve transit.”

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