Wisconsin Counties

State Summary of Transportation Funding and Finance

## **Transportation and Financial Authority:**

Counties have authority to:

• Purchase, operate, acquire, expand, improve, and maintain airports and airport service.

• Lease out any building on airport property and may issue revenue bonds to fund the construction or maintenance of airports.

Counties do not have authority to:

• Levy any noteworthy excise taxes not already listed.

• Levy any noteworthy license taxes not already listed.

• Charge any noteworthy fees not already listed.

Mandated/Authorized Transportation Services:

• **County commissions have control over roads and bridges, including laying them out and constructing them. However, counties may not work on roads located inside corporate boundaries of municipalities without the express permission of the municipality.**

**• The commission may have charge of public buses, school buses, taxicabs, and underground transportation facilities, including the authority to construct or acquire the necessary facilities and equipment to operate any of the above.**

## **Funding Sources for County Transportation Projects:**

Counties Receive:

• Funding almost exclusively through user fees - mostly the gas tax and registration fees.

• Funding from the state for transportation through various programs including General Transportation Aids (GTA), Local Transportation Facility Improvement Assistance, Local Bridge Assistance and Mass Transit.

○ GTA is the largest funding source paid to local governments. In calendar year 2012, $94,615,600 for counties, which is the equivalent of about 23% cost sharing. GTA helps offset the cost of county and municipal road construction, maintenance, traffic and other transportation-related costs. These funds are distributed based on a six-year spending average of a statutorily set rate-per-mile.

○ Local Transportation Facility Improvement Assistance includes the Surface Transportation Rural Program (STP-Rural), the Surface Transportation Urban Program (STP-Urban) and the Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP).

○ Local governments will receive annual federal funds totaling $42,381,927 in the STP-Urban and $24,890,973 in the STP-Rural program for 2011-2014.

○ LRIP funding for 2011-2013 was $56,066,000 from state segregated funds, with a minimum of $56,066,000 in local matching dollars.

○ Local governments will also receive $32,890,200 in annual funds under the Local Bridge Improvement Assistance program for the 2011-2014 program cycle, with $24,431,300 coming from federal funds and $8,459,200 coming from state funds. This program helps rehabilitate and replace the most seriously deficient existing local bridges on Wisconsin’s local highway system.

○ Finally, in the area of mass transit, qualifying local governments can receive funding through the State Urban Mass Transit Operating Assistance Program.

## **Challenges in Funding and Financing Transportation Projects:**

● Wisconsin has over 114,800 miles of roads. Local governments have jurisdiction over 103, 000 miles, or 90%, of those road miles.

● The state restricts the amount of property taxes counties can raise to pay for these services.

○ Counties now operate under permanent levy limits, and have also been subject to tax rate limits barring them from exceeding their December 1992 property tax (mill) rate.

○ Due to declining property values, some counties have had to cut their budgets beyond what is required by the levy limits to comply with the tax rate limit.

○ The partnership between counties and the state is being challenged by funding shortfalls, as well as increasing amounts of lane miles and vehicle miles in the state each year and increasing demands on infrastructure.

## **Innovative Solutions to Funding and Financing Challenges:**