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Budget Repair Bill Protects More Than 2,000 Transportation Construction Jobs in Wisconsin

MADISON, Wis. – Representatives of Wisconsin’s transportation construction industry today praised legislative leaders for reaching a bi-partisan budget repair agreement that avoids expensive long-term borrowing and invests additional federal transportation aid in infrastructure. The group also commended Gov. Jim Doyle for keeping planned highway construction projects on schedule, saving more than 2,000 jobs.

The package agreed to Monday by leaders in both houses of the Legislature and passed by the Senate on Tuesday allowed the state to proceed with bid lettings for 55 highway and bridge projects throughout the state. Those bids represent a \$116 million commitment to Wisconsin’s economy and its communities.

“We are pleased that transportation funds will be used to maintain and improve our highway system,” said Terry McGowan, business manager for Operating Engineers Local 139. “These projects will contribute to a safe and efficient system that keeps the state competitive, as well as providing good-paying, family-supporting jobs when our struggling economy really needs them.”

The bi-partisan budget agreement allocates \$77 million in additional federal highway aid to Wisconsin’s highway improvement program. These are revenues paid by motorists in the form of federal gas taxes and were intended by Congress to help states meet growing infrastructure needs. For example, Wisconsin’s Legislative Fiscal Bureau recently estimated that the state is facing a nearly \$1 billion annual transportation funding deficit.

“There is no greater economic stimulus than a good-paying job. These federal monies will put more Wisconsinites back to work immediately filling potholes, improving roads and growing our economy,” said Pat Goss, executive director of the Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association. “The Governor’s willingness to go forward with the May highway letting is also good news that will keep more than 2,000 men and women working in family-supporting jobs.”

Several highway user groups had lobbied the Legislature to not use the Transportation Fund to balance the state budget. “The Transportation Fund has been used to balance the state budget three times in the past five years,” Goss said. “Budgets are about priorities and this budget compromise not only avoids cuts to education and other vital services, but it begins to finally reverse a dangerous trend in an industry that has lost over 1,600 jobs since 2000.”

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