

# I-94 East-West **ECON**Connect



April 4, 2017

Sen. Alberta Darling  
Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee  
Room 317 East  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53707

Rep. John Nygren  
Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee  
Room 309 East  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Darling and Representative Nygren:

As the Legislature begins deliberations on the upcoming biennial budget, we urge you to reinstate Wisconsin's commitment to rebuilding an important economic corridor for the Milwaukee area, Waukesha County, and all of the state. We are among the many businesses that lie along, and/or rely upon, the I-94 East-West Corridor between 70<sup>th</sup> Street and 16<sup>th</sup> Street for our employees and customers. We are not alone in that regard; nearly 200,000 Wisconsin jobs are located within 2 miles of this corridor. It is for this reason and others that we emphatically support enumeration and incremental funding for this project in the 2017-19 budget.

The East-West Corridor is the gateway for the products and venues that make our region vibrant and healthy. The beer, pizza, motorcycles and steel that the rest of the world wants begin their journey along this corridor. Millions heading each year to visit Summerfest, the Brewers, Bucks, State Fair or downtown Milwaukee travel this vitally important corridor.

Maintaining state support for the East-West Corridor project in the upcoming budget is important for these reasons:

- **It would validate the \$20 million-plus already invested into constructive progress on the project.** Planning, environmental study and clearance, and early engineering work has been completed and can be used if the project moves forward now. The nearly 60-year-old corridor's reconstruction was originally planned to begin in 2018-2019 which is now 2020-2021 at the earliest as a result of prior funding shortfalls; further delays could endanger the federal government's 2016 approval of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision, and seriously affect the consensus built amongst a broad cross-section of stakeholders who support the project;
- **Lack of enumeration and funding will cost more, in re-work and additional delays.** The project will languish even further, adding more costs to the project due to re-engineering, cost escalations, continued driver delays due to worsening congestion, and perhaps another short-term re-paving project costing tens of millions and adding long-term lane closures. In a February 17<sup>th</sup> editorial, the Milwaukee Business Journal said: "(the) surprising decision to drop funding in (the) 2017-19 state budget to rebuild Interstate 94 near Miller Park makes little sense, given the importance of that stretch of freeway to southeastern Wisconsin's economy"; and
- **Enumeration and funding will result in tangible and important benefits.** Reconstruction will improve safety. Accidents and injuries dropped dramatically after reconstruction of the Marquette Interchange, and we look forward to a safer Zoo Interchange in the near future. Keeping the East-West project on schedule fully realizes the benefits to be accrued by the investments made in both of those major interchanges.

The 140,000 to 160,000 vehicles that travel the I-94 East-West Corridor each day are a testament to the important role it serves in our region and state's transportation system.

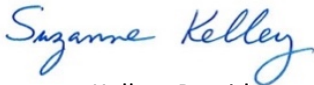
The Department's original budget request for enumeration would have moved I-94 East-West into the Southeast Freeways Program, where the Legislature and Governor would have had opportunities to scrutinize the project and decide on additional funding on a recurring two-year basis, under future biennial budget discussions. The 2017-2019 budget request from the Department for this project was for \$31 million and was sufficient to continue preliminary engineering. This additional early design work is essential to providing the taxpayers with an accurate assessment of the program's full costs and schedule, something that has occurred regularly and accurately for each of the preceding Southeastern Wisconsin freeway reconstruction projects. Unfortunately, this funding was removed.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration worked hard during the study, and cut over \$200 million of project costs based on engineering design and collaboration with stakeholders. Both are committed to continuing to find efficiencies and cost savings that can only come from continued engineering, and timely construction.

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Please support safety, jobs and economic development by enumerating and funding the I-94 East-West Corridor project in the 2017-19 state budget.

Sincerely,



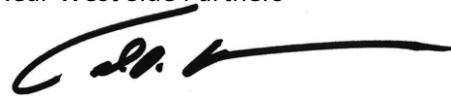
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Ted Kellner  
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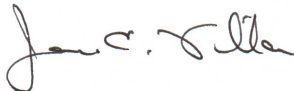
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cc: Joint Finance Committee members