

# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Tuesday, February 27 ~ 10:30 – 11:45 am

Facilitator: Paul Halverson

## US Highway 2 & 13 Intersection Safety

The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin thank the legislature and the Department of Transportation for holding a public input session in 2006 and installing a short-term recommended “Advance Warning Flasher”. We respectfully request the Department of Transportation to commit to completing a study and design, which will identify options for improvements to the Highway 2 & 13 Intersection, provided that funding can be secured.

**Background:** In 2003, a Highway Safety Committee met to study and recommend improvements to the “T” intersection of State Highway 13 and US Highway 2 near Ashland. As a result, a sign-bridge identifying turning lanes, a designated turning lane, improved radius for entry onto Westbound US Highway 2, and improved line painting were approved and implemented. Unfortunately, the improvements did not reduce the amount of accidents/fatalities at the intersection. In November of 2005, another fatal accident took place, in addition to five other non-fatal accidents since the time of the improvements. As a result of these accidents, additional safety improvements, including more rumble strips and a flashing stop sign were added.

This intersection is one of the busiest and most dangerous in both Ashland and Bayfield Counties. Senator Jauch and Representative Sherman have held a Public Hearing about this intersection. The majority of schools, cities and counties have submitted resolutions requesting improvement at this intersection. The common theme is that the intersection is dangerous, confusing and in need of more stringent safety processes.

**Request:** We respectfully request that the Department of Transportation to commit to completing a study and design, which will identify options for improvements to the Highway 2 & 13 Intersection, provided that funding can be secured.

### **For further information contact:**

Mary McPhetridge, Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce

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## US Highway 2 Expansion

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the Legislature expands Highway 2 to four (4) lanes from the Michigan State line to the Minnesota State line.**

**Background:** We propose that US Hwy 2, currently a two-lane non-divided highway, be converted to a four lane highway between Superior (Douglas County), Ashland (Ashland County), and Hurley (Iron County). This portion of highway encompasses approximately 100 miles of roadway, spanning the width of four counties and is the only major highway in the state that crosses both the east and west borders. US

# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Hwy 2 forms the main transportation route for citizens, visitors and commerce through Northern Wisconsin.

US Hwy 2 is a major NAFTA artery, increasing every day. Canadian trucking is finding it more economical to travel from eastern Canada to western Canada through the Northern US rather than north of Lake Superior. Second, Interstate 75, which runs from Sioux St. Marie to Tampa, through major metros like Detroit, Cincinnati and Atlanta, ties into US 2 in the Upper Peninsula. Development of US 2 through Northern Wisconsin would encourage Michigan to do the same, which would ultimately develop into a major interstate, bringing increased federal transportation funding into the state as well as linking the northland to the major commerce grid throughout the US.

With regard to planning and economic development, infrastructure is the most pressing development need for the northern portion of the state. Responsible economic development is encouraged by each of the four counties and cities along the route. Each county faces their own unique infrastructure challenges, which provide barriers to economic development. Appropriate roadways, accessibility of electricity, as well as water and sewer systems are the primary infrastructure concerns. Electricity, water and sewer must be addressed location by location; however, appropriate transportation routes are a broader concern, which impact all of Northern Wisconsin collectively. The whole point of planning is to control where issues like traffic develop. Traffic goes where the highways are.

In his last state of the state address, former Governor Thompson said that 95% of all manufacturing jobs during his 14 years in office were within 5 miles of the centerline of a backbone highway (meaning a 4-lane, 65 mph highway). By converting US Hwy 2 from a 2-lane highway to a 4-lane between Superior and Hurley, we would remove one of the primary barriers to economic development in the Northland.

In taking a look around the State, you can see the growth in the areas that have four lane highways. Examples are the growth on the 94 corridor from Hudson to Eau Claire, the growth on Highway 10 at Stevens Point and at Appleton, and the growth around the highway 29 areas of Chippewa Falls and Wausau to name a few.

US Hwy 2 connects with US Hwy 53, a 4-lane freeway, as well as US Hwy 35 at the Minnesota border, also a 4-lane freeway. These freeways are main arteries to the metropolitan areas of the Twin Cities and Eau Claire. The continued expansion of Hwy 51, north of Wausau to Hurley would create a stronger transportation infrastructure in the future.

In Governor Jim Doyle's GROW WISCONSIN 2005 AGENDA, under the topic of TRANSPORTATION, the Governor stated that "With a safe, efficient and high-quality transportation system, Wisconsin can capitalize on economic opportunities and foster economic growth". He also stated that "businesses need good roads for the flow of supplies, goods and services", and he recognizes that "investments in our infrastructure are vital to the state's economy".

**For further information contact:**

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# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

## US Highway 13 Passing Lanes

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the Department of Transportation considers a Highway 13 expansion to include additional passing lanes.**

Over the years, we've seen a marked increase in the traffic on State Highway 13 in Ashland County. The Highway 13 corridor is very hilly and scenic. Truck traffic, in particular has increased and can slow the traffic flow. Passing lanes, especially in the more hilly areas would keep the traffic moving. The ability to move goods and services through our area can help the economy of the whole region.

### **For further information contact:**

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## US Highway 53 Safety Team

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the US Highway 53 Safety Team to be called together again to examine the three year crash data and determine if the solutions are still effective, as well as examine other solutions to increase the safety of the USH 53 corridor thru Northwest Wisconsin.**

**Reason for Request:** At Superior Days in 2000, Douglas, Washburn and Barron Counties requested that the safety of the at grade intersections along the USH 53 corridor be addressed. US Highway 53 is an expressway with local at grade crossings in these Counties. The concern of the counties centered on 6 major intersections that had high incidents of crashes. They are CTH B in Douglas County, STH 77, USH 63, CTH E and CTH B in Washburn County and CTH V in Barron County.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation District 8 Office formed the US Highway 53 Safety Team to study these intersections and determine what improvements can be made to improve their safety. It was determined by the Committee to look at solutions that could be cost effective and implement them in as short of a time period as possible.

The Committee's three-tiered solution of Enforcement, Engineering and Education was implemented in 2001 and 2002. The solution has resulted in some reduction in accidents. The Committee has not meet since 2002. It was determined at that time to implement the chosen low cost solutions and study their effectiveness.

Accidents at these intersections are usually severe, given the speed of the traffic involved. Accidents at these intersections often result in severe injury or fatality. The Citizens of Northwest Wisconsin feel that several these intersections continue to have high incident of injury related accidents.

# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Therefore, the Citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request that the US Highway 53 Safety Team be called together again to examine the three year crash data to determine if the solutions are still effective, as well as examine other solutions to increase the safety of the USH 53 corridor thru Northwest Wisconsin.

**For further information contact:**

Mark Servi, Washburn County Highway Commissioner

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## **Weather Indicator Signs for WI US Highway 53 in Superior Entering Blatnik Bridge**

The Superior Days delegation would like to kindly request the Department of Transportation to consider weather indicator road sign(s) on the Superior side of the US hwy 53 to inform motorists of road conditions for safety purposes before they enter the Blatnik Bridge and crossing into Minnesota. Due to slippery winter conditions on the bridge and fog during winter and other seasons, numerous deadly accidents have occurred on the bridge. There is a bridge weather warning sign on Hammond Avenue before entrance to the bridge, which is helpful. The Hwy 53 entrance to the bridge is heavily used and thus we are requesting the Department of Transportation to seriously consider this request. Lives will be saved!

**For further information contact:**

Bob Browne, Douglas County Board Supervisor

Phone: (715) 394-6235

## **US Hwy 63 Reconstruction within the City of Spooner**

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the State Department of Transportation allocates highway funding for a highway improvement project on State Trunk Highway 63 on the south side of the City of Spooner.**

**Reason for Request:** The City of Spooner is in desperate need for a highway improvement project on State Trunk Highway 63 on the south side of the City of Spooner. The DOT shows this area as one of extreme congestion on page 19 of the "WI State Highway Plan 2020, Summary Report", dated November 17, 1999. The DOT 1999 Annual Average Daily Traffic estimate is 19,100 vehicles in this area. The estimate for year 2004 was 20,900 vehicles. The estimate for year 2024 is 25,000 vehicles.

The DOT has scheduled a project that included widening the area to a 4-lane facility and a traffic signal for the year 2004. The DOT has determined that the traffic is more than 40% local traffic and therefore according to their policy requires a 25% local match. The City of Spooner has met with the Department to discuss the project, which has been put on hold. Wis DOT finished an overlay project within the city limits in 2004; this project is expected to last 10 years.

It is time to begin planning for the reconstruction project now. The City of Spooner can simply not afford to pay this amount for a project that is desperately needed to improve the roadway level of service and safety. The roadway is used by many people from areas outside the city and outside the state as well. The

# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

2006 City of Spooner budget is \$3.2 million, with a local levy of \$960,000. A project of the magnitude described above is too large a burden for Spooner to handle on its own; we would have to almost double our local levy if done in one year. We are requesting that monies be included in a negotiated transportation package to fund the local contribution for this project.

**For further information contact:**

Bill Marx, City of Spooner Administrator

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## **Madeline Island Road Improvements**

At the request of State Senator Robert Jauch, State Representative Gary Sherman, and Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary Frank Busalacchi, the Island Road improvement is added to the 2007 Superior Days agenda.

Early last year, the La Pointe Town Board formed an ad hoc committee to design a comprehensive plan for Madeline Island's 2008 road improvements. Ashland County plans to have an asphalt plant in place at that time, for Highway H resurfacing. The Town wishes to take advantage of that situation to pave North Shore Road and its connectors.

On October 8, 2005, the committee met with Senator Jauch, Representative Sherman, and Secretary Busalacchi in Bayfield to discuss our problems and seek solutions. At that meeting, we discussed increased tourism from the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and the impact on transportation and safety related to the road infrastructure. While there was unanimous agreement over the needed road improvements, it was noted that size and population restrictions made the island ineligible for most state and federal grants. In addition, state tax laws on equalization and revenue sharing have left the municipality with virtually no money to address its own needs. Secretary Busalacchi expressed his commitment to the road project and formed a committee of his top management to work with us on costs and funding.

It was concluded that our committee does the following:

- Research all grants and determine whether or not we qualify
- Study alternatives for road resurfacing
- Prepare a comprehensive road plan
- Obtain cost estimates

Over the past year, the committee has worked with WisDOT to complete all of these tasks. Senator Jauch suggested we lobby to have our road improvement funding included in the budget for 2008. We were to have the aforementioned tasks completed and be prepared to discuss them at 2007 Superior Days. Accordingly, the committee has written a detailed issue paper, which included the comprehensive plan, and sent it to our state and federal representatives in December, 2006.

**For further information contact:**

Jerry Smith, Chair, Ad Hoc Committee of the Community and Public Works Planning Committee (CAPP) for 2008 Road Improvements

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# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

## Rural Public Transportation

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the Legislature provide support for rural public transportation expansion in our region through expedited funding for new and/or expanded service for public transportation and provide for greater flexibility for riders and providers utilizing present state-funded transportation services.**

**Background:** Earlier this year the Wisconsin DOT requested Northwest Regional Planning to bring together transportation stakeholders from the 10 Northwest Wisconsin counties to develop Public Transit Human Services Transportation Coordination Plans. At the county-wide transportation meetings participants rated how well each County's providers presently coordinate transportation services and identified transportation coordination solutions. Both the participants at individual meetings and the county plans strongly agree on the need and the means for achieving better coordination. Areas of strong agreement include:

1. Transportation programs within the region can do a better job of coordinating services.
2. More riders could travel on the same vehicle and beyond county lines, if eligibility and funding for transportation programs were not so narrowly restricted.
3. Legislative leadership is needed to expedite funding and policy change for all phases of improvement in coordinating transportation services.
4. DOT, DHFS and other state departments should expedite funding and policy change.

Legislative support for public transit, inter-and intra-county will create a benefit to citizens of Northwest Wisconsin. A model already exists that can be expanded or supplanted. It is a joint powers agreement between LCO tribe of Ojibwe and the Sawyer County Board of Supervisors, with authority created with representatives of both governing bodies. The transit service, using public funds, provides both route services and ride on demand services, countywide for the public at subsidized rates. This request is supported by a unanimous vote of the Sawyer County/LCO Transit Authority, and of the Economic Development and Planning Committee of the Sawyer County Board of Supervisors.

**For further information contact:**

Mike Keefe  
Washburn County Administrative Coordinator  
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Bruce Miller, Chair  
Sawyer County Board of Supervisors  
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## Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery Road Access

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:*

- **That the State of Wisconsin, through the Department of Transportation or the Department of Veteran's Affairs, provide funding for the paving of Wildcat Road, a Town of Beaverbrook Road that provides access to the Northern Wisconsin Veteran's Memorial Cemetery.**

# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**Reason for Request:** There is a 0.85-mile section of Wildcat Road that is currently unpaved. Due to high traffic during holidays and funerals, the Wisconsin State Patrol has requested that the traffic be sent to STH 70 and Wildcat Road rather than the intersection of Veterans Way and USH 53. This causes traffic to use the unpaved section of Wildcat Road, which gets extremely rough and dusty during these times of high traffic. By providing for the paving of Wildcat Road, the safety of those utilizing the northern access to the Veterans Memorial Cemetery will be greatly increased.

**For further information contact:**

Mark Servi, Washburn County Highway Commissioner

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## **Railroad Crossing Safety Funding**

*The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin Request:*

- **Increased financial support for the upgrade Railroad crossing warning devices in rural Douglas County.**

Railroad crossing warning devices in rural Douglas County are currently meeting only the minimal standards set by the DOT. Crossing upgrades are currently financed according to reactive statistics based on reports of near misses by train crews, and actual accident reports.

Crossing upgrades can cost as much as \$100,000 for full protection to including center dividers with warning lights and signal arms. Most of our rural crossings are protected solely by a post with reflective cross bucks. We do not need the highest level of protection, but a minimum of warning lights will drastically improve the safety of our citizens.

Wisconsin is currently 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation for RR crossing fatalities. We should be taking a proactive approach to prevent injuries and fatalities rather than a reactive approach.

Since 2000 Douglas County has had 27 RR crossing incidents involving 6 injuries and one fatality. Train frequency and speed has drastically increased due to the Railroads ever increasing competitive advantage in shipping costs.

We should not wait for further increases in incident frequency to justify the funding of public safety.

**For Further Information Contact:**

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