

## Gov. Evers Visits Green Bay to Highlight Initiatives to Build 21st Century Infrastructure

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin

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***Money to improve roads, highways, bridges. Governor's budget includes investment to support repairs at Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge in Green Bay.***

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GREEN BAY — Gov. Tony Evers yesterday visited Green Bay to highlight his 2023-25 biennial budget initiatives to ensure Wisconsin's infrastructure is prepared to support a workforce and economy of the 21st century. The governor is proposing to make critical investments to build 21st century infrastructure, invest in expanding access to reliable, high-speed internet, and continue the governor's work over his first term improving Wisconsin's roads, highways, and bridges, including a \$1.2 million investment to support repairs for the Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge in Green Bay.

The Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge was built in 1998 and has been in need of repairs for several years. According to estimates from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, in 2018, approximately 15,400 vehicles used the Nitschke Bridge daily. The governor's 2023-25 biennial budget proposal includes a \$1.2 million investment to support making the necessary repairs to this critical infrastructure. During the governor's visit to Green Bay, he was joined by State Rep. Kristina Shelton (D-Green Bay) and Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich. A photo of the governor's visit is available [here](#).

In his 2023-25 Biennial Budget Message, Gov. Evers unveiled his plan to invest in 21st century transportation and infrastructure in Wisconsin, including support for repairing the Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge:

"Part of ensuring our infrastructure is ready for a 21st century workforce and economy is

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building upon our work over the last four years to improve over 5,800 miles of roads and nearly 1,600 bridges. I'm also proposing the highest level of funding ever into aid that goes directly toward helping local counties and communities repair and maintain our roads to do just that.



"We're also investing in key projects across the state, from the Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge in Green Bay to the Blatnik Bridge in Superior. And we're expanding transportation alternatives in our small communities, building out our electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and re-engineering roads to improve safety and help prevent reckless driving.

"These investments will be critical for bringing our infrastructure into this century. At the same time, we're still balancing these investments with prudent decisions to prepare for future economic uncertainty. So, we're going to use a portion of our state's surplus not to create more ongoing expenses but to reduce them. We're going to pay down \$380 million in state debt in transportation revenue bonds. That means we'll spend less of your hard-earned tax dollars in the future paying on debt and interest so we can stay focused on fixing the darn roads.

"Investing in 21st century transportation and infrastructure is essential to prepare our workforce and our economy for the future, and we have to start right away. But infrastructure is only one part of the work ahead of us to keep our talented workforce here and bring more talent to Wisconsin. ..."

The governor previously proposed funding for the repairs to the bridge in his 2021-23 biennial budget, but the measure was removed from the final budget by Republicans in the Legislature. Following Republicans removal of this measure from the budget, State Rep. Shelton proposed

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a bill based on the governor's original budget proposal to fund these repairs. Once again, Republicans in the Legislature failed to act and approve these funds.

The governor's comprehensive transportation budget proposal introduced last week prepares the state for its future by proposing two new funding sources for the state's transportation fund and utilizing federal funding to further build out Wisconsin's electric vehicle charging infrastructure, enabling the state to use \$34.5 million in federal funds over the biennium, along with potential state funds, to allow greater use of electric vehicles throughout the state.

Additionally, the governor is proposing using nearly \$380 million of the state's historic surplus to pay down debt in the transportation revenue bond program, allowing funds currently devoted to debt service to become available for improving Wisconsin roads and saving the state money on future interest payments.

A breakdown of the governor's proposals to build safe, reliable infrastructure, pay down debt service, and expand high-speed internet service for Wisconsinites is available below.

### Transportation

Gov. Evers understands that safe, reliable infrastructure is critical to the success of Wisconsin's economy and workforce, and ensuring these connections for local communities is essential to keeping the state moving forward. With this proposal, Gov. Evers continues his past investments in the state's infrastructure and lays a strong foundation for future investments.

#### *Local Roads and Services* ▯

Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Increasing general transportation aids for both counties and municipalities by 4 percent in calendar year 2024 and another 4 percent in calendar year 2025, providing the highest level of funding for general transportation aids in the program's history;
- Providing \$50 million in segregated funds annually for an ongoing supplement to the Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP) to increase direct support of local road and bridge projects across the state. Additionally, increasing funding for the existing LRIP program by 4 percent in each year of the biennium;
- Increasing state support of mass transit aids by 4 percent in calendar year 2024 and calendar year 2025 to further support non-drivers' access to employment, healthcare, and recreation throughout the state. Additionally, increasing funding to programs supporting transportation for the elderly and people with disabilities, paratransit, and employer-sponsored commuting options.
- Restoring the ability of cities, villages, and towns to use eminent domain to build pedestrian and bike paths;
- Providing \$1.2 million of segregated funds annually to provide matching funds for the

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Transportation Alternatives Program for small communities;

- Allocating \$8 million of segregated funds to support local government administration of federal funding opportunities to support local roads, including technical assistance opportunities; and
- Allowing local governments to establish Regional Transit Authorities throughout the state as local governments deem necessary for the benefit of their residents.

### *Bridges and Highways* □

Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Providing \$47.2 million in bonding to begin reconstruction of the Blatnik Bridge in Superior in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation;
- Providing \$50 million in bonding to support the Southern Bridge project on the Fox River in Brown County;
- Directing \$1.2 million in segregated funds for pressing repairs for the Ray Nitschke Memorial Bridge in Green Bay; and
- Investing \$77 million in the State Highway Rehabilitation Program.

### *Road Safety* □

Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Improving the safety of travel on Wisconsin's highways by providing 35.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions for additional state troopers and 10.0 FTE positions for motor carrier inspectors;
- Providing \$60 million to establish a new traffic calming grant program;
- Providing \$16,000 to develop and implement electric vehicle license plate stickers to assist first responders in emergency response for electric vehicles;
- Implementing Driver Licenses for All, regardless of documented status, to improve the safety of Wisconsin roads for everyone in Wisconsin;
- Restoring roadway design considerations in state law that support non-motorist infrastructure known as "Complete Streets," empowering local communities to safely integrate all modes of transportation;
- Invest \$6.5 million to cover the cost of comprehensive driver education for economically disadvantaged students;
- Require that courts order the use of an ignition interlock device (IID) for all offenses involving the use of alcohol and operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated (OWI), joining 30 other states and D.C. in requiring all offenders, including first-time offenders, to install an IID; and
- Increasing Wisconsin's seatbelt violation penalty from \$10 to \$25 to match neighboring states.

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### *Electric Vehicle Infrastructure*

Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Establishing a program to utilize federal funding to further build out Wisconsin's electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This action will enable the state to use \$17.1 million of federal funding in fiscal year 2023-24 and \$17.4 million of federal funding in fiscal year 2024-25, along with potential state funds, to allow greater use of electric vehicles throughout the state;
- Providing \$234,900 in fiscal year 2023-24, \$177,300 in fiscal year 2024-25, and 2.0 FTE positions to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to provide consumer protection oversight of electric vehicle charging stations; and
- Modifying current law to explicitly exempt from the definition of a public utility, a nonutility that supplies electricity through an electric vehicle charging station and charges by duration or the kilowatt-hour.

### *Supply Chain Investments* □

Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Providing \$16 million in bonding for dredging, seawall reconstruction, and other projects associated with the Harbor Assistance Program;
- Providing \$20 million in bonding for the Freight Rail Preservation program; and
- Increasing the number of days that an employee of a Farm Service Industry employer can carry a seasonal Commercial Driver's License from 180 to 210 days.

### *Laying the Foundation for Future Infrastructure* □

Gov. Evers is proposing using nearly \$380 million of the state's historic surplus to pay down debt in the transportation revenue bond program, allowing funds currently devoted to debt service to become available for improving Wisconsin roads and saving the state money on future interest payments.

Additionally, the governor proposes providing two new sources of revenue to fund infrastructure improvements throughout Wisconsin and maintain a healthy transportation fund, including:

- An amount calculated from the state sales tax generated by the sale of electric vehicles;

and

- A transfer of a portion of the state sales tax on the sale of auto parts, tires, and repair services.

These transfers will allocate nearly \$190 million from the general fund to the transportation fund over the biennium.

### **Broadband**

Over the past four years, Gov. Evers has gotten to work to expand access and affordability of high-speed internet for Wisconsinites across the state, and in 2021, he declared it the Year of Broadband Access. The governor continues his commitment to closing the digital divide by again providing the largest state investment in broadband expansion in the state's history.

#### *Expanding Access and Affordability*

Gov. Evers is proposing investing \$750 million in the Broadband Expansion Grant program with a requirement that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) spends at least \$75 million annually on grants. This historic proposal builds upon the governor's previous record-setting investments in expanding broadband across the state and is more than four times larger than the total funding provided to the grant program over Gov. Evers' past two budgets.

The governor is also proposing strengthening the Broadband Expansion Grant Program to ensure that all Wisconsinites have access to reliable and affordable broadband service by:

- Increasing the speed threshold for broadband service for an area to be considered "served" to 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 20 Mbps upload and allowing the Commission to periodically update this speed threshold based on technology and market conditions;
- Requiring an area to have access to broadband service that is "available, reliable, and affordable" for the area to be considered "served;"
- Requiring the Commission to consider the affordability of broadband service in the proposed project area when evaluating grant applications; and
- Establishing a procedure for internet service providers to challenge a grant award.

Additionally, Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Creating a Broadband Line Extension Grant Program, funded at \$1.75 million in fiscal

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year 2023-24 and \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2024-25, to provide grants and financial assistance to eligible households to subsidize the cost of a line extension from existing broadband infrastructure to a residence that is not served by a broadband provider; and

- Eliminating several statutory restrictions for certain municipalities defined as broadband “unserved” to enable them to directly invest in broadband infrastructure and provide service to residents and allowing these communities to apply directly for broadband expansion grant funding from the Commission.

### *Promoting Equity and Reliability* □ □

Gov. Evers is proposing to:

- Modify current law to create a Digital Equity program supported by funding from the state universal service fund; and

- Modify current law to protect broadband customers by requiring broadband service providers to meet certain service requirements, including prohibiting a broadband service provider from denying service to residential customers based on race or income and requiring providers to award credits to customers’ internet bills based on service outages.