



MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Daniel Bahr, Government Affairs Associate

DATE: December 14, 2017

SUBJECT: Opposition to Assembly Bill 361

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) is opposed to Assembly Bill (AB) 361, which requires a referendum prior to adoption of a local vehicle registration fee. Local governments throughout the state have enacted local registration fees in recent years in an effort to fund deferred maintenance on the local transportation network.

The decision to impose a vehicle registration fee to support the County Trunk Highway system and local transportation infrastructure is a decision best made at the local level. Ultimately, local elected officials are accountable to local taxpayers and are currently subject to voter approval via the ballot box. Adding a referendum requirement is a costly and unnecessary requirement for local governments to enact a vehicle registration fee. Traditionally, state funds accounted for 30 percent of local transportation maintenance costs. This state-local partnership reflected a desire to ensure local governments received an adequate share of state gas tax and registration fee dollars to maintain local roads and bridges. However, due to stagnant revenues in the state's transportation fund, state support to counties is now below 20 percent.

Fortunately, the most recent state budget provided significant increases in local transportation aids. Local governments are incredibly appreciative of these additional funds, but more work remains to be done. With county road replacement schedules exceeding 100 years in some parts of the state, additional revenues are needed. Currently, in an era of tight property tax controls, the local registration fee remains one of the few options for counties to pay for ongoing infrastructure maintenance.

Again, local officials are elected by local taxpayers and must answer to those taxpayers at the ballot box. Imposing additional requirements on local government's ability to raise transportation revenues is not in the best interest of local taxpayers, the local economy, or the state's entire transportation network.

We respectfully request the committee oppose AB 361 and work with all transportation stakeholders on a sustainable, long-term solution to transportation funding.