INTERIM REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE YEAR 2035 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PLAN

The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) is conducting an interim review and update of the year 2035 regional transportation plan. The review and update occurs every four years and was last done in 2010. The regional transportation plan is intended to provide a vision and guide for transportation system development in the Region for 20 years into the future. The plan consists of five principal elements:

- Public Transit
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities
- Transportation System Management
- Travel Demand Management
- Arterial Streets and Highways

The plan was adopted by the Commission in June 2006, and was published as SEWRPC Planning Report No. 49, A Regional Transportation System Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2035. Individuals wishing to learn more about the plan may request copies of a newsletter summarizing the regional land use and transportation system plans, or visit the Commission's website at www.sewrpc.org/2014update.

The interim review and update includes the following steps:

- Examine the forecasts underlying the plan.
- Measure transportation system performance.
- Assess the implementation to date of the regional transportation plan recommendations.
- Based on existing and reasonably expected future funding, determine whether it remains reasonable for the recommendations in the plan to be achieved over the next 20 years.

REVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Review of transportation system performance trends indicates little change in pavement condition, traffic congestion, arterial street and highway travel speeds and times, and transit travel times. Substantial reductions in all air pollutant emissions are estimated, particularly for ozone-related emissions, with the exception being an increase in greenhouse gas-related emissions and ammonia. In addition, there has been some improvement in bridge condition and some reduction in highway and transit fatalities, injuries, and crashes.
IMPLEMENTATION TO DATE OF YEAR 2035 PLAN

The plan is about eight years, or about a quarter, into its 30-year implementation period. Since adopting the regional plan in 2006, plan implementation has lagged modestly to significantly depending upon the plan element concerned. The following is a summary of implementation by element since the plan was adopted in 2006:

- **Public Transit:** The year 2035 plan recommended a near doubling of vehicle miles of service for the transit system in the Region by 2035. Since 2006, transit service has declined by about 4 percent (7 percent decrease in fixed route bus service and 17 percent increase in shared-ride taxi service), and transit fares have increased faster than inflation. The reduction in the areal extent of transit service from 2005 to 2012 is shown on Map 1.

- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities:** Of the 384 additional proposed miles of the recommended 586-mile off-street bicycle and pedestrian path system, 47 miles, or 12 percent, have been constructed since 2006. With respect to recommended accommodation of bicycle travel on the regional arterial street system, WisDOT and FHWA now require such consideration during preliminary engineering conducted for State, county, and local arterial construction and reconstruction using State and Federal funds. Since 2004, on-street bicycle accommodations—bike lanes, paved shoulders, and outside widened lanes—on arterials increased by 199 miles, or 31 percent.

- **Transportation Systems Management:** Implementation has included the expansion of freeway ramp-meters, variable message signs and closed circuit television cameras, and installation of a 511 travel information system. Other implementation has included additional traffic signal interconnection and coordination.

- **Travel Demand Management:** Implementation has included expansion of park-and-ride lots, transit system internet trip planners, and automatic bus location systems, and development of site-specific transit-oriented development neighborhood plans for the nine KRM commuter rail station areas.

- **Arterial Streets and Highways:** About 57.3 miles, or 13 percent, of the plan-recommended 453 miles of arterial capacity expansion have been completed and are open to traffic as of 2012. There has been some progress since 2006 in reconstructing the 270-mile freeway system in Southeastern Wisconsin with completion of the Marquette and Mitchell interchanges, as well as about five miles of the 30-mile project to reconstruct I-94 between the Mitchell Interchange and the Illinois State line, to be completed in 2021. In addition, the reconstruction of the Zoo Interchange began in 2013 and is planned to be completed in 2018.

The lagging in plan implementation is a result of significantly constrained transportation funding. The indexing of the State motor fuel tax to inflation, the principal source of State transportation funding—ended as the regional transportation plan was being completed. With respect to transit funds, State funding of transit systems was reduced by 10 percent in the 2011-2013 State budget (though some but not all of the State funds for transit were restored in the 2013-2015 State budget). Additionally, legislative efforts have not progressed since 2010 to provide a dedicated local funding source for transit or create a regional transit authority (RTA), which the year 2035 plan recognized as being necessary to fully implement the transit improvements and expansion recommended in the plan.

Key Differences between Year 2035 Vision and Fiscally Constrained Plans

- **Freeway Reconstruction**
  - Vision Plan: 255 miles (all remaining segments)
  - Fiscally Constrained Plan: 89 miles (see Map 2)

- **Public Transit Improvements and Expansion**
  - Vision Plan: 76,300 additional weekday vehicle miles of transit service for a 125 percent expansion from current levels
  - Fiscally Constrained Plan: 6,900 fewer weekday vehicle miles of service (from current transit service levels) for an 11 percent decline, which would come from reductions in service frequency. There would be no improvements or expansion in the transit system, except for the Milwaukee streetcar.

Consequences of Current Fiscal Constraints

The gap in funding between estimated costs and existing and reasonably expected revenues will have significant negative consequences on the transportation systems in Southeastern Wisconsin:

- Traffic congestion and travel delays may be expected to significantly increase, and travel reliability will decrease, as highway capacity improvements are deferred and delayed and public transit is not improved and expanded in the Region's most heavily traveled corridors, urban areas, and activity centers.

- Transportation-related energy consumption and air pollution emissions may be expected to be greater as a result of increased traffic congestion and a lack of improvement and expansion of public transit.

- Costly emergency repairs and inefficient pavement maintenance may be expected to be required on freeways as segments of freeway and freeway bridges reach the end of their service life and funding does not permit their reconstruction.

- For the estimated 10 percent of Region residents who are unable to use or cannot afford an automobile, mobility and access to the Region will be severely limited, including with respect to jobs, health care, education, grocery shopping, and other basic travel needs. This will impact minority and low income populations to a greater extent, as minority and low income populations have lower levels of automobile ownership and disproportionately use and are dependent on transit.

- Costs of public infrastructure and services, and the taxes necessary to support them, may be expected to be higher as improved and expanded public transit would not be available to support and promote more efficient higher density development.

All of these consequences may be expected to negatively impact economic growth in the Region and quality of life for its residents.

**REVIEW OF AVAILABLE FUNDING TO IMPLEMENT THE 2035 PLAN**

As part of this review and update of the year 2035 regional transportation plan, the estimated 2035 plan costs were compared to revenues expected to be available over the remaining 20 years of the plan. In 2014, the existing, and outlook for future, available revenue is far more constrained than in 2005 during development of the year 2035 regional transportation plan and in 2010 during its first update. As a result, it is no longer possible to conclude with this plan update that the year 2035 regional transportation plan was reasonably consistent with existing and reasonably expected to be available revenues and the current limitations of those revenues. As such, it was necessary to consider the year 2035 plan as a “vision” plan, outlining the desirable transportation plan to address the current and future needs of the Region. It was further necessary to identify a “fiscally constrained” year 2035 regional transportation plan which includes those elements of the 2035 plan which can be achieved within the restrictions of the amounts and limitations of existing and reasonably expected to be available revenues.

Fiscally constraining the plan would result in a reduction in the amount of freeway that can be reconstructed by the year 2035 and the deferring of the planned extension of the Lake Parkway between Edgerton Ave and STH 11 in Milwaukee County. The principal effect on the transit element is a lack of the transit improvement and expansion identified under the 2035 plan, with the exception of the implementation of the City of Milwaukee streetcar project, along with about an 11 percent reduction from current transit service levels and an estimated average annual increase in transit fares above inflation.

**PROVIDED IN THE REGION: 2005 AND 2012 CHANGES IN PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE**

**Public Transit Improvements and Expansion**

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