

**For Immediate Release**  
November 9, 2004 (11:00 A.M. CST)

Contact: Ernie Stetenfeld  
AAA Wisconsin  
(608) 828-2487

Tom Walker  
Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association  
(608) 209-1000

## **Broad Coalition Launches Campaign to Protect Transportation Funding**

*New “TRUST Coalition” mounting aggressive, statewide effort to promote safety, mobility and economic development*

(MADISON) – A diverse group of transportation interests today launched a campaign to ensure that the transportation user fees paid by Wisconsin citizens and businesses are dedicated to maintaining and improving the state’s transportation system.

“People are wasting valuable time sitting in traffic, needed local and state transportation projects are being delayed, driver safety is being compromised – and, if we don’t do something soon, these issues and others will have a very real and negative effect on our economy,” said Ernie Stetenfeld, **AAA Wisconsin** vice president of corporate relations and co-chair of the TRUST Coalition. The newly-formed TRUST (Transportation Revenues Used Strictly for Transportation) Coalition was unveiled at a state Capitol press conference this morning.

“The TRUST Coalition is looking forward to working proactively with the Governor and legislators to preserve the integrity of the Transportation Fund,” said co-chair Tom Walker, executive director of the **Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association**. “Various members of the coalition may differ on how transportation funds may be used in Wisconsin, but we all agree that the user fees paid into the segregated Transportation Fund ought to be used to maintain and improve the system.”

This morning, representatives from 14 statewide organizations explained why they support efforts to preserve the \$2.5 billion annual Transportation Fund and what their role will be in this statewide effort. The non-partisan coalition membership crosses transportation interests, labor-management and philosophical lines in the interest of protecting the Fund. Top priorities of the group will be protecting the integrity of the Fund, maintaining the annual adjustment in the state fuel tax (indexing), and promoting fiscally prudent borrowing for transportation.

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## **2-2-2-2 Coalition to protect Transportation Fund launches campaign**

“Organized labor has a major stake in how the state’s infrastructure is functioning,” said Mike Ryan, president of **Wisconsin Laborers’ District Council**. “Not only do transportation investments create good-paying, family-supporting jobs, they also foster home-grown opportunities for workers that can’t be outsourced to another country.”

Stetenfeld noted that **AAA Wisconsin** supports efforts that increase safety on the state’s roads and highways. “We also have to be diligent in protecting people’s hard-earned money that they spend on transportation-related fees,” he said. “This money is intended for improving the safety of our state’s transportation system and we cannot afford to lose it.”

In the last budget cycle, \$675 million in Transportation Fund revenues were transferred to the General Fund for non-transportation purposes to help the state address a record \$3.2 billion General Fund deficit. Currently, Wisconsin funds investments in all transportation modes almost exclusively through highway user fee revenue like vehicle registration fees and fuel taxes. By any measure, co-chair Walker said, every other state that is advancing a transportation agenda to reduce congestion, improve safety and promote economic development has many more funding options at its disposal. He emphasized that the highest priority must be to maximize the investment value of user-fee revenues.

“Gov. Doyle’s ‘Grow Wisconsin’ initiative seeks to re-energize our rural economy with steps to make agriculture – the state’s largest economic sector – more modern, productive and competitive,” said Rick Stadelman, executive director of the **Wisconsin Towns Association**. “That means larger operations and bigger equipment for economies of scale. And all of that translates into more demands on town roads that were not designed for these kinds of loads.”

Tim Sheehy, executive director of the **Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce**, echoes Stadelman’s concerns. “Transportation investment is a critical component of my organization’s long-term plan for economic prosperity,” he said. “Reconstruction of the Marquette Interchange is Wisconsin’s largest transportation project ever, and it will have huge benefits for the region and the state. We want to make sure future transportation funding decisions allow us to proceed seamlessly with reconstruction of other segments of the freeway system.”

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### **3-3-3-3 Coalition to protect Transportation Fund launches campaign**

Currently, the state’s Transportation Fund is a “segregated fund” because its user fee revenues are kept separate from sales, income and other tax revenues that are deposited in the state’s General Fund. The 29.1-cent gas tax makes up 64% of state transportation revenue and is the single largest revenue source to the Fund. Wisconsin is unique in how it funds transportation – relying almost exclusively on gas taxes and vehicle registration fees (currently \$55 for cars and light trucks) for state revenues that fund all transportation programs.

The TRUST Coalition will begin an aggressive informational campaign in communities across Wisconsin and in the state Capitol, where the coalition plans to work closely with the Governor and Legislature to protect the Transportation Fund.

The TRUST Coalition is comprised of:

- AAA Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA)
- Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce (MMAC)
- Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC)
- Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin (WTDA)
- Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association
- Operating Engineers Local 139
- Wisconsin Laborers’ District Council
- Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA)
- National Association of Minority Contractors – Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Professional Loggers Association
- Wisconsin Timber Producers
- Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association
- Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association