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The \$800 Million High Speed Rail Boondoggle

On a recent party-line vote, the Legislature's budget-writing committee approved spending \$800 million to create a high speed rail line between Milwaukee and Madison. Mass transit is an important component of our transportation infrastructure, but this plan raises too many doubts to justify its price tag. Here are some of the reasons my fellow Republicans and I voted NO.

PROJECT COST: The \$800 million price tag is astounding, but it is hard to conceptualize such a figure. To give you a sense of perspective, the recent Marquette Interchange reconstruction cost \$810 million. 300,000 vehicles travel through the Marquette Interchange *every day*.

RIDERSHIP: The Department of Transportation expects the Milwaukee to Madison train will carry 361,000 passengers in the first *year*. (Remember the Marquette Interchange processes nearly this many vehicles in one *day*.) This small a number of riders simply does not justify such a major cost.

ROUND TRIP FARE COST: The DOT expects a Milwaukee to Madison and back roundtrip will cost somewhere between \$40 and \$66. (And don't forget cab fare to your final destination.) Will people be willing to pay this much money to ride? I'm skeptical.

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE THIS RAIL LINE WILL END IN MADISON: Madison politicians are still squabbling about whether the train line should end at the airport or closer to downtown. Right now the plan is to put the station at the airport. The airport is six miles away from downtown, the university, the Capitol or any other place people may actually want to go in Madison.

ONGOING STATE TAXPAYER SUBSIDY: A rough estimate from the DOT is that state taxpayers will need to kick in \$8 million every year to subsidize the rail line's operation. That is \$8 million out of the transportation fund that will no longer be available for maintenance on existing transportation infrastructure.

FUZZY ESTIMATES: But before we put too much stock in any Doyle Administration estimates on this project, let's remember how wildly fluctuating their numbers have been so far. First the Governor told us this rail project would create 13,000 jobs. Then a couple days later that figure plummeted to 4,700 jobs. Oops.

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