

## **NOTICE OF PROPOSED GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

Connector newsletter July 2018

Pursuant to Wis. Stat. s. 227.112, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is hereby seeking comment on Connector newsletter July 2018, [ch. TRANS 28, Wis. Stat. ch. 85, Wis. Stat. ch. 346, Wis. Stat. ch. 349], a proposed guidance document.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION**

Comments may be submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for 21 days by:

1. Department's website: <https://appengine.egov.com/apps/wi/dot/guidance-docs?guidDocId=OPA174>

2. Mailing written comments to:  
Office of Public Affairs  
Wisconsin Department of Transportation  
4822 Madison Yards Way  
PO Box 7910  
Madison, WI 53707-7910

### **WEBSITE LOCATION OF FINAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

The final version of this guidance document will be posted at [wisconsindot.gov](http://wisconsindot.gov) to allow for ongoing comment.

### **AGENCY CONTACT**

DOTOPAGuidanceDocs@DOT.WI.GOV



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# Connector newsletter - July 2018

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## The Connector

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### **Flood-damaged roads reopened in time for northern Wisconsin bound vacationers**

Solid recovery plan, teamwork expedited repairs, reduced traffic detours, delays

Tanner Schafer and Joe Starr - July 31

Three days of strong thunderstorms and heavy flooding caused widespread road damage in northern Wisconsin last month, leading Governor Scott Walker to declare a state of emergency for Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas and Iron counties.



Governor Walker along with Wisconsin National Guard Major General Donald Dunbar surveyed flood-affected areas from the air and on the ground to get a true perspective of the damage. One of the [Governor's tweets](#) showed the devastating force of flood waters as they rolled over a roadway in Douglas County. During a press conference that same day in Superior, the Governor laid out the plan for how Wisconsin DOT would work with local highway commissioners, public works departments and other local

leadership to get roads open, detours marked and motorists on the road as the busy tourist season ramped up.

Governor Walker also requested the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to conduct a preliminary damage assessment of the region that experienced more than \$11 million in damage to roads and bridges. FEMA responded by sending out strike teams—most paired with Wisconsin DOT and Emergency Management representatives—to assess damage sites. Along with the National Guard, and Wisconsin Emergency Management, Wisconsin DOT assessed 18 municipalities and more than 300 sites in Bayfield County, alone.

Thanks to these proactive efforts and a well-prepared network of first responders, road repairs were made far ahead of schedule allowing Wisconsin's vibrant tourist season to continue motoring forward. Roads leading to favorite vacation destinations are open and ready to welcome anyone desiring a relaxing respite in the Badger State's gorgeous northern reaches. Even some of the worst damaged areas found along WIS 35 and WIS 53 were repaired ahead of schedule.

Credit for this fast action was due primarily to emergency first responders and road repair crews who converged on the region during and after the storm to assess damage, safely reroute traffic and make repairs before reopening those roads. An impressive undertaking, seeing as portions of the region received more than a foot of rain in that three-day period. Strong storms led to downed trees and power lines, mudslides, and flash floods damaging roads and bridges. But long before the severe weather reached the region, Wisconsin DOT, and its many partners were ready and waiting for what was to come.

Storm flooding left extensive damage to the region's state and local roads, damaging and in some cases washing out entire road sections, culverts and bridges. A section of WIS 35 at Pattison Park south of Black River was especially hard hit. Approaches to a bridge were replaced after being washed out by flood waters. Repairs extended along WIS 35 as far south as Dairyland with shoulder and culvert damage occurring at points throughout this stretch. One remaining closure is along US 2 near North Fish Creek where repairs to a large culvert washout are scheduled to be complete and the road reopen in late August.

A challenge northern Wisconsin faces during these events is that there are few state highways where traffic can be rerouted, which can lead to long detours. To alleviate this, repair crews work hard to fix and reopen roads as soon as possible. And efforts are ongoing to find the shortest detours as emergency response crews constantly weigh motorist convenience with traffic safety.

Several other smaller repairs were made and

roads opened within the hours and days following the storm. Speed with which these repairs occurred is due primarily to teamwork and preplanning within Wisconsin DOT and among its partners at the local, state and federal levels. Strong coordination among the department, counties, local law enforcement and State Patrol during, and in the hours and days following the storm, was crucial in getting problem roads identified, shut down and safe.

“The normal process of emergency life safety initial response is pretty well ingrained in what these folks do,” said Wisconsin DOT’s Northwest Region Director Jerry Mentzel. Compared to the flood event that hit the area in 2016, this year was less severe, but as was the case in 2016, Mentzel continues to be impressed with the region’s ability to anticipate issues and respond. One long-standing partnership making this possible is among Wisconsin DOT and the state’s 72 counties.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources was another critical partner Mentzel points to. Their ability to work with Wisconsin DOT while managing flood damage affecting its trails and parks is something he says comes with experience. The Federal Highway Administration, he said, also deserves credit for its timely site reviews to determine what was eligible for emergency funds, therefore expediting repair work.

But an emergency response like this doesn’t happen without preparation and there is plenty that goes into developing processes and relationships that make dealing with a chaotic natural disaster look easy.

“Effort up front pays off in events like this where it makes the extraordinary look ordinary,” says Mentzel. Much of the work happening during the event is made possible by thousands of hours of training, planning and coordination. One measure put in place prior to the 2016 flood event was having an established incident command structure. Within this structure, clear roles are established so when an event occurs, responsibilities and chain of command are outlined early, increasing response efficiency.

A plan introduced during this latest event involved Wisconsin DOT staff members reaching out to local government leaders during and in the hours following the event to determine how their communities were doing and what assistance was needed while putting them in contact with an emergency response representative.

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## Strike Team’s Process

- 1st** Wisconsin DOT, National Guard and Wisconsin Emergency Management assess damage, including 300-plus sites in 18 municipalities in Bayfield County, alone.
- 2nd** Data from these assessments is compiled into binders for FEMA review, before making a determination on any federal funding allocations.
- 3rd** FEMA assesses damage in the field at locations with more significant damage, with Wisconsin DOT assisting in Bayfield and Douglas counties. FEMA also works with local governments and Wisconsin DOT to review the information assembled from the initial assessments, and provides guidance on FEMA funding eligibility.

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## Students gain real-world knowledge working wetland delineations

[Tanner Schafer](#) - July 27

From walking long stretches of highway ditch in the scorching sun to wading through knee-high river silt, Brittney Hubbell and Hannah Jahnke have accepted

that getting dirty is all in a day's work.

The work they do is called wetland delineation, which involves determining wetland's presence near highway construction sites. For the past ten years the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Northwest Region has [employed college interns](#) like Hubbell and Jahnke to complete wetland delineations, a collaboration proving to be beneficial for all involved.

Wetland delineation is a process of taking soil and vegetation samples, doing hydrology checks, and getting GPS measurements over the course of hours or days to determine the type of wetlands in an area. Samples are analyzed in the field and a report is written using sample findings. WisDOT uses these reports for construction projects where a wetland is nearby to determine the effect the project may have on that wetland. Wetland delineation findings allow decisions to be made on how to work with the wetland as part of the project. Sometimes the project can even be stopped if the impact is deemed too high.

Interns work under supervision of project staff members while they gain experience in their field of study. The work they do frees transportation staff to focus on the larger project scope, knowing that important baseline data is being gathered. Northwest Wisconsin has seen firsthand the benefits of this program as the universities of UW-Superior and UW-Eau Claire have biology programs with students possessing relevant knowledge for conducting these tasks.

As Hubbell, a UW-Superior student, said, "We are gaining great experience that will be important on our resumes after graduating college." A primary benefit to the interns is the real-world experience that ties in with their classroom studies.

"Being able to actually key plants with a guide and observe their flowering and growth in different communities gives you another level of understanding in the classroom," said Hubbell. "It also helps to identify all the distinction in plants and wetlands that are hard to understand from simply reading a textbook."

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Hubbell and Jahnke work a wetland delineation.

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## State Patrol's Air Support Unit provides a valuable eye in the sky

[Rob Miller](#) - July 16

To help fulfill their duties in serving and protecting the public, the Wisconsin State Patrol utilizes a variety of tools and technologies - ranging from troopers, inspectors and K-9 partners on the ground - to aircraft overhead. As part of its public safety mission, the State Patrol operates an Air Support Unit (ASU) that has several important responsibilities:

**Enforcing traffic laws** - especially in areas



Wisconsin State Patrol's Captain Ryan Chaffee conducts an aerial enforcement mission.

that are difficult for ground-based units to access, like construction zones and highway sections with limited shoulders or crossovers.

**Assisting partner agencies** with criminal surveillance, crime scene photography and searches for lost or wanted individuals.

**Planning and oversight** of major public events.

**Responding to natural disasters** like floods or tornadoes to document damage and help coordinate emergency response

Currently, the State Patrol has six licensed pilots who utilize three Cessna 172 Skyhawk aircraft located across the state. The three aircraft are shared state assets that are also available to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), state Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and WisDOT's Bureau of Aeronautics for state business needs.

When conducting speed enforcement, State Patrol pilots use a computerized on-board timing device known as VASCAR (Visual Average Speed Computer and Recorder). By using roadway stripes spaced at regular intervals, the VASCAR unit and pilot can quickly and accurately determine a vehicle's speed - the 660 feet between stripes, divided by the amount of time required to cover that distance. From their aerial vantage point, pilots are better positioned to identify traffic violations that occur over an extended distance including speeders, drivers following too close, or reckless or aggressive drivers. When law violations are observed, pilots radio ground-based officers to initiate a traffic stop.

"Speeders and reckless drivers endanger everyone traveling our roadways," said Lieutenant Chris Jushka, who oversees the State Patrol's Air Support Unit. "We inform the public about many aerial missions ahead of time by alerting the media and posting signs along the freeway. It reinforces that our goal is not to simply stop and cite motorists, but to enhance public safety through voluntary compliance with traffic laws." Aerial enforcement patrols are often posted on the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) sites.

According to Lt. Jushka, speeding is much more than a traffic law violation - it's a major public safety issue that contributes to numerous traffic crashes, injuries and deaths. The State Patrol uses specialized [data technologies](#) to pinpoint places where aerial support will be effective in areas where violations are most likely to occur.

"Most State Patrol aerial missions are funded with federal dollars that are specifically designated for traffic law enforcement," Lt. Jushka said. "To make the most effective use of our flight time and personnel, we analyze data on traffic citations and crash reports to identify specific highway corridors for enforcement activities."

Last year, during 61 aerial enforcement missions, officers stopped 1,899 vehicles and issued 1,333 citations. Weather permitting, ASU traffic enforcement missions typically last four hours and average between 30 - 40 traffic stops.

## Notable incidents this year

**Drug overdose** - An April 19 detail along the Madison Beltline in Dane County was cut short when troopers were called upon to revive a drug overdose victim. The State Patrol has [ramped up drugged-driving enforcement](#), and since January of this year all State Patrol officers carry the opiate-reversing antidote Narcan.

**One of the highest speeds recorded this year** was a motorist clocked at 101 mph along I-94 in

Eau Claire County the afternoon of June 11. State law allows for a citation of up to \$326 for such a violation. Revenue generated by traffic citations is not kept by the State Patrol. Per state law, citation revenues are distributed to the state's common school fund and to the county where the citation was issued.

## Other ASU activities this year

**Assisting the Department of Natural Resources** to locate and recover a drowning victim in a northern Wisconsin lake.

**Searching for a homicide suspect** in Rusk County. The suspect was located and taken into custody.

**Photographing/documenting storm-related damage** in several northwestern Wisconsin counties in mid-June.

"As the only statewide police-manned aerial support unit, the State Patrol receives an ever-increasing number of requests to assist our law enforcement partners at the federal, state and local levels," Lt. Jushka said. "While traffic law enforcement is one component, the ASU handles a variety of search, surveillance and photographic duties that can only be accomplished from a pilot's perspective."

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## SS Badger dock repairs made possible by Harbor Assistance Program grant dollars

Joe Starr - July 16

Witnessing the SS Badger power past the Breakwater Lighthouse as it slips into Manitowoc Harbor on a warm summer day is an awe-inspiring sight.



From Bridget VanGinkle's drone [video footage](#) of the SS Badger entering Manitowoc Harbor.

The car ferry easily pushes into the calm harbor waters as its powerful propellers turn the giant hull, slowly maneuvering it to the shore. Once tied securely, passengers disembark via vehicle, bicycle and even on foot as freight is unloaded onto the Badger's sizeable dock.

The dock has taken its share of abuse in recent years from unrelenting winter storms. The most recent coming last April with gale-force winds conjuring up giant lake waves that breached the harbor's protective pier walls crashing

into and destroying sections of the dock and loading equipment. A similar storm in the winter of 2015-2016 damaged steel pile bulkheads and the fender system of an adjacent dock section.

The 2016 and 2018 dock repairs were made possible in large part to \$3.8 million dispersed through three [Harbor Assistance Program](#) (HAP) grants. The program assists harbor communities along the Great Lakes and Mississippi River to maintain and improve waterborne commerce. Port projects typically include dock reconstruction, mooring structure replacement, dredging and the construction of facilities to hold dredged material. For the Badger, HAP has been critical to keeping its Manitowoc

dock operational during the past three years. The ferry's role as a regional economic driver includes safe transport of 85,000 passengers annually as well as being an important transportation link for vehicles and cargo.

In 1953, the Badger and its sister ship the SS Spartan joined a fleet of ferries used to transport freight-filled rail cars across the lake. As the need for ferrying rail cars waned and automobile culture grew in line with an expanding national highway system, car ferry numbers decreased and those remaining transitioned to passenger-based transport. Motoring tourists or anyone desiring a lift between Ludington, Michigan and Manitowoc could now enjoy an enchanting four-hour cruise over one of the world's largest freshwater bodies. During this time, the ferries also became part of the new system of national highways as this route completed a circuit of US 10 that extends from Bay City, Michigan to West Fargo, North Dakota.



The Spartan's decommissioning in 1979 left the Badger as the last of a generation of giant Great Lakes rail-car ferries. As the Badger continues to transport passengers along this well-traveled and storied passage, it also carries memories of a romantic era in Great Lakes maritime history. The Badger was named a national historic landmark in 2016 and is currently one of the state's six ferry services accommodating passengers, autos, recreational vehicles, tour buses, motorcycles, bicycles and commercial trucks.

While the nostalgia of Great Lakes car ferry travel lives on through the Badger, another car ferry service about 80 miles south looks to continue the tradition well into the 21st Century. The Lake Express car ferry carries passengers between Muskegon, Michigan and Milwaukee's Port of Milwaukee. The ferry is quite a bit smaller than its northern elder, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in speed covering the nearly 90-mile crossing in about 2 1/2 hours.

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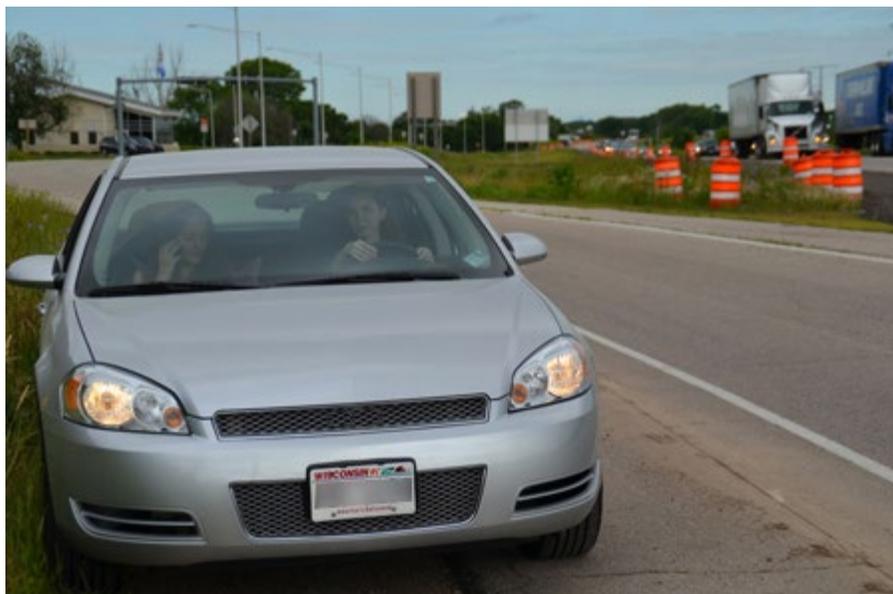
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## With work zone breakdowns it's all about making the right moves

Claire Franken - July 16

The day has come. Your 1999 sedan, dotted with rust stains and plagued by a permanently lit maintenance light, finally breaks down on the freeway. You find yourself pulling off to the side of the road in the middle of a work zone. Knowing what to do next is important in ensuring you, your passengers and others on the road remain safe.

**Check for injuries.** If your car was disabled because of a crash or other incident, check yourself and everyone else in the vehicle for injuries and call 911 immediately if



anyone is injured.

**Steer vehicle to safe location.**

If everyone is uninjured and the vehicle is drivable, turn on its hazard lights and drive it to a location away from traffic onto a shoulder, ramp or temporary pull-off zone. Wisconsin's Incident Traffic Law, also known as "Steer It, Clear It" requires motorists to pull over to minimize traffic obstructions and secondary crash

opportunities. Work zones can be as narrow as 11 feet and lacking shoulders or pull-off zones, so pull over as far to the right and away from traffic as possible. If you're stuck in a work zone without a shoulder and you are obstructing traffic, you must call 911 as you should for crashes, injuries and other emergency incidents.

**Stay in the vehicle.** You may be tempted to exit the vehicle to pop the hood and check its vitals. Resist this temptation and remain in the vehicle with seat belts fastened. Remember, other drivers are zipping along the highway. At 55 mph, a vehicle travels the length of a football field in about four seconds leaving little if any room for error.

"If you're outside of your car in a construction zone, you could become a target," said State Patrol Major Tony Burrell. "Stay in the vehicle with your seat belt buckled. Highway road construction does not accommodate pedestrians. Leaving the vehicle exposes you to high-speed traffic and work zone hazards." In the past five years, 50 people have been killed and 4,595 injured in work zones. Remaining in the vehicle limits this risk as vehicles are made to withstand some degree of impact and their sturdy frames, seat belts, and airbags offer added protection in case of a collision.

**Move Over Law.** Passing cars must abide by the "Move Over Law" to avoid secondary crashes. If the road has more than one directional lane, the law says the driver, whenever possible, must move over to allow a buffer lane between traffic and a stopped emergency response vehicle. If conditions restrict ability to move over or there is only one traffic lane, drivers must slow down to ensure safety.

**Roadside assistance.** For other issues like running out of gas or a flat tire, highway safety patrols travelling primarily in metropolitan areas can offer assistance. It's a good idea to be aware of where these patrols are used and to keep their contact information available if the need arises.

**Always drive alert, be prepared.** Roadwork and construction paired with motorists towing boats, campers or utility trailers can present dangerous conditions on roads. It's important to reduce distraction and maintain the same level of alertness in the summer months as you would during the icy winter months. Pay attention while driving - turn off phones, set a playlist, check mirrors, don't block mirrors and windows with an over-packed car, and if a breakdown occurs follow these guidelines to avoid further problems:

- Keep provisions like water, snacks, blankets, first aid supplies, phone chargers, extra clothing and a visibility vest inside the vehicle.
- Keep contact information for insurance and roadside assistance providers in vehicle.
- Stay updated on specific routes and coverage hours of highway safety patrols, as they vary by region.

- Pay attention to road signs and mile markers so to effectively explain your location, if you need to call for help.

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## Rest area speed limit changes implemented with pedestrian safety in mind

Claire Franken - July 3

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation recently implemented a 25 mph speed limit at all rest areas to address safety concerns from [rest area maintenance \(RAM\) program](#) workers.



"There wasn't any one particular incident that led to this change, but we felt proactive steps were appropriate to better reduce risk of any potential problems," said State Freight and Roadside Facilities Unit Engineer Bill Wondrachek.

"Rest areas are meant to provide safe respite from the roadway, and we want to ensure that a tone of safety is there throughout the full experience."

Wisconsin DOT is using its feedback sign at different rest areas statewide to remind motorists to slow down. This sign uses radar to read vehicle speeds and displays those speeds while alerting drivers who are speeding.

"Once people see their speed, they become conscious of how fast they're going and they do begin to slow down," said Wondrachek.

Slower speeds allow drivers longer reaction times as rest area visitors are out taking breaks from the road and RAM staff are working the grounds.

More than 17 million people stop at Wisconsin rest areas annually. The [busiest rest area](#), located in Columbia County, sees an average 1,677 vehicles daily. With such high-volume traffic, slowing down remains crucial in maintaining motorist and rest area worker safety.

### RAM program keeps it clean

Wisconsin's rest areas and [Safety and Weight Enforcement Facilities](#) are staffed by workers with cognitive disabilities through the RAM program, managed by the Bureau of Highway Maintenance.

Since 1987, RAM has provided employment to skilled workers in partnership with community rehabilitation programs.

In 2017, RAM employed 397 individuals with disabilities, allowing them greater independence. Employees work hard to provide the best-maintained roadside facilities in the nation and motorists notice.



New speed limit signs like the one at top will work in tandem with speed feedback signs like the one at bottom to inform and alert drivers upon exiting a highway to a rest area.

A recent Rest Area Visitor Survey revealed more than 95% of respondents reported cleanliness of restrooms as excellent or good. Show your appreciation by slowing down and keeping RAM staff safe.

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