



TRAVIS TRANEL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 49th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-1170
Toll-Free: (888) 872-0049
Rep.Tranel@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Testimony for the Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Assembly Bill 244

May 23, 2023

Thank you, Chair VanderMeer and members of the committee for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 244 today and its substitute amendment. This important legislation will help create an Agricultural Roads Improvement Grant Program (ARIP) utilizing \$150 million of one-time state surplus dollars. Funding will target investment toward rebuilding high economic impact Ag roads that are in need of upgrade and modernization. Getting our state's agricultural products to market quickly, efficiently, and safely needs to be a top priority because of the important role it plays in our state's economy and nation's food security.

Our state has a strong and diverse agricultural economy that accounts for nearly \$105 billion and 436,000 jobs. We need to invest in the future so we can stay competitive in the ever-evolving global marketplace. However, as the pandemic and global supply chain crisis highlighted, our state's road infrastructure at the town and county level in rural areas has been falling behind for decades and needs to be upgraded. Weight restrictions, alternative route requirements, weak culverts, and bridge closures are all hindering Wisconsin's Ag economy from reaching its full potential in delivering secure, quality food products at affordable prices.

Farmers around the state are traveling farther and farther from their home farms to find ground to run. They are telling me that something needs to be done to fix our local rural roads to better handle the modern equipment they have to utilize in order to remain competitive. Farmers should not be doing more damage to their equipment while on the road than they do in the field planting or harvesting.

This is why we have been working extremely hard since the beginning of the session in a collaborative way with ARIP's coauthor Sen. Marklein, The Wisconsin Ag coalition, and local government officials to create the Agriculture Roads Improvement Program (ARIP). This legislation builds upon the successful Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) that helps provide grants to local government which targets seriously deteriorating highways.

ARIP focuses on the problem and targets economic bottlenecks through a grant program for local government units to help rebuild vital Ag roads that meet specific economic criteria and needs. The goal of ARIP is to revitalize local infrastructure and save time, money, and resources for farmers helping them remain competitive, productive, and successful far into the future.

ARIP Bill:

1. \$150 million investment in targeted Ag roads.
2. Allows local units of government to apply for grants with up to a 100% match. (planning, design, engineering, and construction)
3. Makes the grant process simple, efficient, and streamlined. (2-page DOT grant application)
4. Road would need to be posted
5. If the applicant chooses, they can work with the county or state to manage the ARIP project.

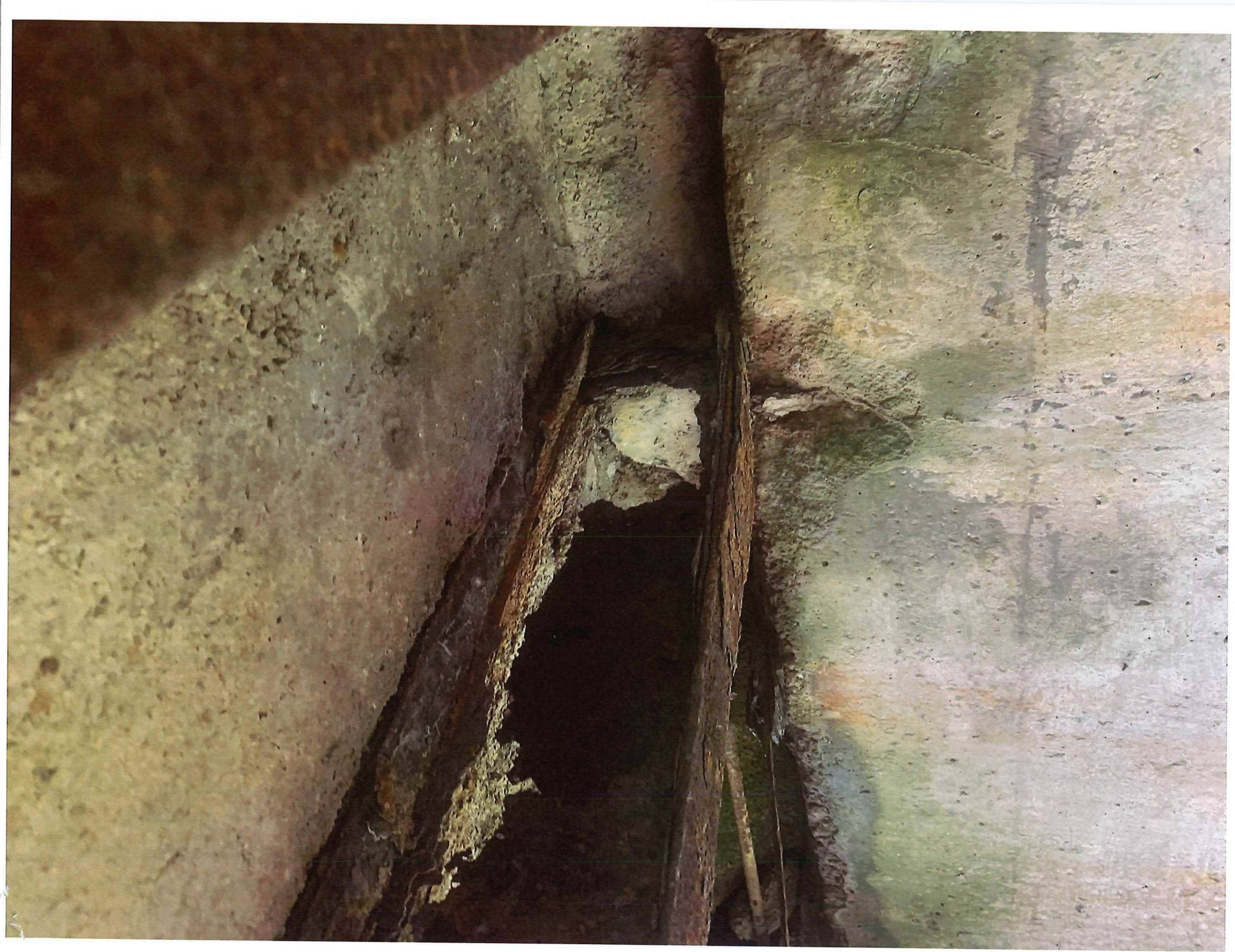
ARIP Substitute Amendment Improvements:

1. Clarifies that “forestry products” are included within the bill’s definition of “agricultural goods.”
2. Explains that to receive priority in the grant process the project will reduce any of the following: deferred or delayed trips, repeated trips at reduced weights, labor costs, fuel costs, mileage, and damage to equipment used in Ag production.
3. Removes age requirement determination for road, bridge, or culvert. (challenge to determine in some cases)
4. Takes out the appropriation, in order to fund the bill via the budget process.

This legislation has been introduced with my coauthor Senator Marklein in the hopes that it will begin the process of building a modern Ag transportation infrastructure system that meets the needs of modern equipment for farmers to ensure secure, quality food products are affordable for Wisconsin families. We are extremely happy to have over fifty bipartisan cosponsors of this legislation, and the support from over thirty agriculture and local government groups. Many of whom are here to testify in support of this bill today.

Thank you for taking the time to hear AB 244 and it’s our hope you will consider supporting this important bill and move it forward.







HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

May 23, 2023

Assembly Committee on Transportation Testimony on Assembly Bill 244

Good Morning!

Thank you Chair VanderMeer and committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 244, which would establish an Ag Roads Improvement Program (ARIP).

Rep. Tranel and I drafted AB 244, which is modeled after the very successful Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP), which provides road funding to other local, rural roads. We propose to fund ARIP with \$150 million in one-time money in a new continuing appropriation.

Deteriorating Class B and weight-restricted roads throughout Wisconsin restrict the ability of farmers to move full truckloads of goods off the farm to processors and to market. These bad roads also limit their ability to receive large shipments of feed and other items efficiently. As a result, farmers, suppliers, and transport companies have to take half loads or miles-long detours to be in compliance with weight restrictions. This increases costs for farmers and suppliers and causes bottlenecks in the food supply system.

We propose that the ARIP will be 100% state funded which means that no local match is required to do ARIP projects. These roads are the most rural in the state. Towns often do not have the resources to provide the necessary match to access existing funding programs. The goal of this program is to make it as easy as possible for towns to access the money.

The funding in ARIP will be targeted to the first-mile of roads and bridges that farmers use every day. Specifically, funding will go toward repairing Class B and weight-restricted roads that provide access to farms and agricultural lands. Repairs to bridges and culverts on these roads are also eligible for funding. After project completion, the road will no longer be a Class B or weight-restricted road.

Projects will be selected by a committee made up of local government officials and members of the ag community, just like the current LRIP selection process. The bill includes prioritization criteria to ensure money is used most effectively. We prioritize projects that increase access to the largest number of farmers, lead to the largest reduction in deferred or repeated trips, have the greatest economic impact, target roads where the only feasible access to a farm is a single road, and provide funding to towns that cannot otherwise afford to maintain or repair these roads.

There are ag-roads all over Wisconsin that need this funding. I am optimistic that my colleagues in the legislature will recognize the value of this idea and support our work to improve access to and from farms throughout the state.

This bill is supported by the Wisconsin Ag-Coalition, and others including: AgCountry Farm Credit Services, Agricultural Retailers Association, Compeer Financial Services Cooperative Network, CropLife America, Dairy Business Association, GreenStone Farm Credit Services, Midwest Food Products Association, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Wisconsin BioFuels Association, Wisconsin Biomass Energy Association, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association, Wisconsin Milk Haulers Association, Aggregate Producers of Wisconsin, Bayer US, Foremost Farms USA, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Venture Dairy Coop, Wisconsin Dairy Alliance, Wisconsin Independent Businesses, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association, Wisconsin Property Taxpayers, Wisconsin Realtors Association, Wisconsin Towns Association, and Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association.

I am proud to work on behalf of all of the farmers, producers, processors and others in the ag supply chain who work so hard to provide goods and services for Wisconsin's ag economy. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move this bipartisan idea forward.

Thank you again to the committee for hearing AB 244, and your timely action on the bill.



KAREN HURD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 68TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 244
Public Testimony
Assembly Transportation Committee
May 23, 2023

Thank you, Chair VanderMeer and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 244.

In the 68th Assembly District which I represent, there are 42 municipalities, most of them being rural towns. I have been in contact with the town chairs and supervisors, village presidents, city mayors and their boards and councils since January 2022.

Unequivocally, the major concern of these municipalities is the condition of the roads. Of these municipalities the most disadvantaged are the towns. Towns on the average have to maintain 55 miles of road. Most often these roads are gravel. In many places boxed culverts have to be placed on these gravel roads depending on the size of the stream that the road crosses. These culverts are the responsibility of the local town to maintain on a budget that is woefully inadequate.

Not only are the minor collector (gravel) roads in need of attention as well as the box culverts that many of them must utilize, but our Class B roads that run through the rural parts of Wisconsin are desperately in need of attention as well as their boxed culverts. The heavy agricultural traffic that these roads must sustain means that upgrades are essential to keep the farm and forest products adequately moving to the processing plants and further destinations.

It is noteworthy that not only the leaders of these municipalities consider roads to be the number one priority, but citizens in large numbers that live in the 68th District have also, unprompted, expressed their concern about the roads. These citizens have named it their number one priority for me to pursue as their representative.

Assembly Bill 244 will provide much needed help for our agricultural roads. I am in favor of the passage of this bill.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

DATE: May 23, 2023

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

FROM: Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

RE: **Support for Assembly Bill 244 creating the Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)**

Good morning, Chair VanderMeer and members of the Assembly Transportation Committee. Thank you for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 244 creating an agricultural road improvement program. We would like to express our support for this important legislation and appreciation for the bill's authors, Representative Tranel and Senator Marklein as well as those in co-sponsorship. Passage of this legislation is the top priority for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation in this legislative session.

The goal of this program is to rebuild roads, bridges and culverts that are currently posted for weight due to wear and degradation or simply because they were never built to carry modern equipment. For example, the bridge outside La Crosse that recently collapsed under a fertilizer truck was likely built in the 1920s and was certainly not built to any modern engineering standard.

The bill and substitute amendment before you are modeled after the state's Local Road Improvement Program, which provides state grants for local road projects that are otherwise unaffordable for local governments.

The Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP) would provide \$150 million for a competitive grant program targeted to repair roads that impede agricultural operations because they are posted for weight.

To be eligible for the program, a road, bridge, or culvert would have to be maintained by a local government, be weight posted at least annually, and be used by more than one agricultural operator. Structures under twenty feet in length would be eligible for funding under the bill, and forestry is included as an agricultural use.

Projects that meet these criteria would compete for grants based on several factors including: the degree to which they reduce impacts on users in terms of the number of deferred or delayed (generally due to spring postings) trips; reduction in repeated trips at reduced weight; reduction of excess labor or fuel costs; reduction of wear and tear on equipment; the total volume of

agricultural goods hauled over the route; whether the route provides the only feasible access to land or facilities; and routes that provide the greatest economic impact for agricultural users.

The bill provides funding for any costs related to an eligible project including engineering and design work and may cover up to 100% of the project cost.

The bill also provides an allowance for a local government to request that their highway commissioner, with the permission of the county board, or the Department of Transportation (DOT), act as the fiscal agent for the project. Alternatively, the local government may be reimbursed incrementally over the life of the project rather than having to borrow the entire cost. Both these provisions are intended to account for the limited borrowing or other capacities of some smaller local units of government.

Finally, the bill directs DOT to establish a committee and review process for the program like those currently used for LRIP.

Thank you again for your time in hearing this bill. I would greatly appreciate your support and would be happy to answer any questions.

DATE: May 23, 2023

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

FROM: Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

RE: **Support for Assembly Bill 244 creating the Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)**

Good morning, Chair VanderMeer and members of the Assembly Transportation Committee. Thank you for taking the time to hear 2023 Assembly Bill 244 creating an Agricultural Road Improvement Program. My name is Kevin Krentz and I am the President of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation and I'm here asking for your support of Assembly Bill 244 to address a serious and long-standing problem for our industry.

If you ask any farmer, they will tell you the biggest hurdle getting products to market are often the roads right outside their farms. Weight restrictions on roads and bridges across the state have forced farmers to route around postings adding additional miles to their journey or requiring them to run half-loaded trucks because of crumbling infrastructure. Without future investment into rural Wisconsin infrastructure we will see further future challenges for agriculture and add further strain to the food supply chain and increased costs at the farm and the grocery store.

Assembly Bill 244 would develop a new grant program to upgrade local roads and small bridges that serve as the critical link between farmers, their fields, processing facilities, and the businesses that provide essential feed and supplies. Just as Farmers need to make investments in equipment to stay competitive nationally and globally and protect Wisconsin's agricultural product market share. Wisconsin needs to also make investments in the rural economy to ensure that farmers have the tools necessary to operate efficiently and get products to market at a price consumers can afford.

This initiative is requesting a significant investment in the 2023-25 Wisconsin State Budget to provide local governments with resources to make necessary infrastructure upgrades to keep eggs, bacon, and milk on the shelves and our rural economy moving. Unfortunately, the small towns and rural communities where farmers live lack the capital necessary to make this kind of investment. Back in the 1950s and 60s, when Wisconsin initially started to pave secondary roads so those two and 3 axle trucks could get milk and produce off the farm year-round., they likely did not envision the future scale of Wisconsin's agriculture industry, which today is a \$107 billion per year industry just in Wisconsin.

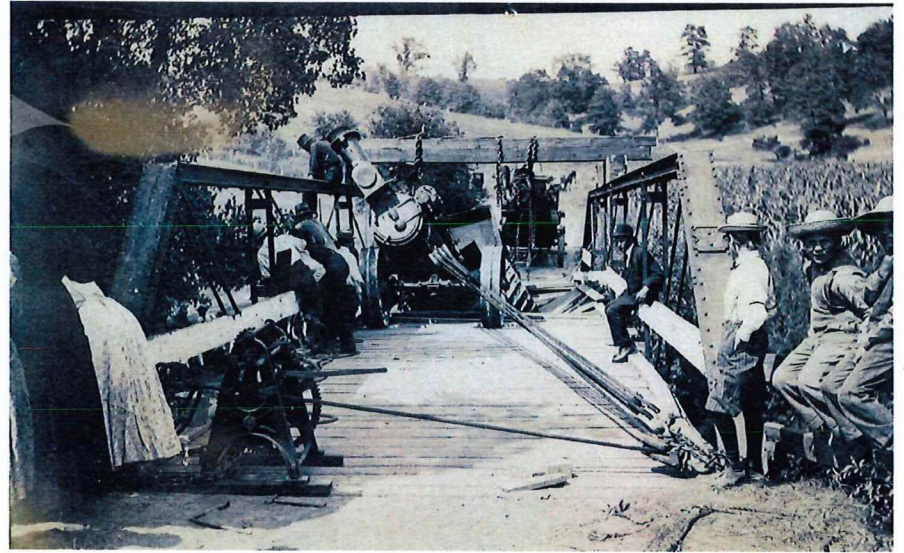
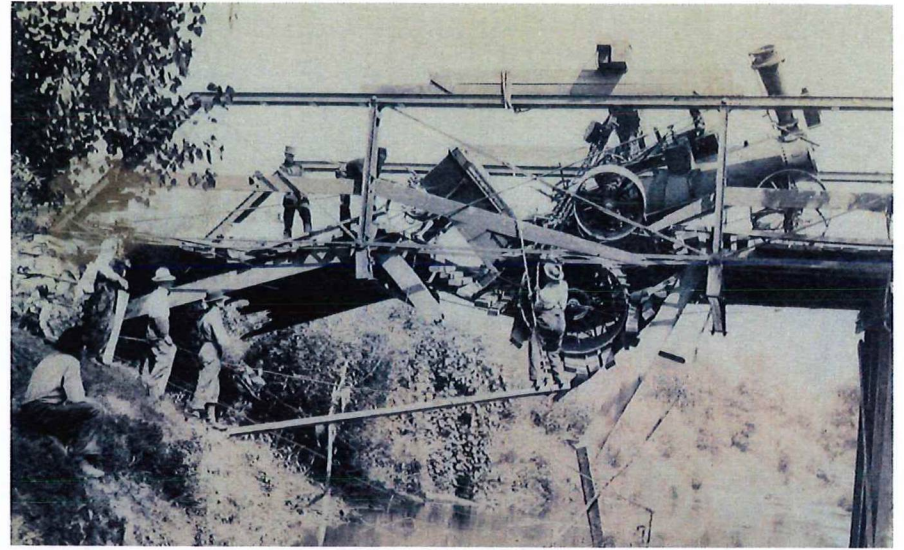
Just as Wisconsin needed investment in the past, we are asking your help to do it again to bring rural infrastructure into the modern era. We need Wisconsin to match the investments that Wisconsin Agriculture has already made so those investments don't go to waste. If we cannot use the equipment as it's designed to be used, efficiency and profitability is lost.

I don't know how many of you here are business owners, but think of what it would do to your costs if every delivery you made you had to make twice, half at a time and twice as far. Think about the operational efficiency lost if every time you went somewhere you had to go on a route that added fifteen miles or fifteen minutes to the trip. That's what road postings do to farmers and ultimately to the price to consumers.

Thank you again for your time and attention today. I'm asking for your support and would be happy to answer any questions.

Town of Jamestown

Year	Equalized Value	Mill Rate	Total Raised	Transportation aid	Shared Revenue	Homes	Farms	Population	commercial	Budget
1980	\$ 46,352,239.00	0.0004975	\$ 17,998.44	\$ 34,071.00	\$ 75,179.00	461	147	2369		\$ 158,649.00
1981	\$ 46,633,600.00	0.0005045	\$ 18,001.05	\$ 24,803.00	\$ 76,668.00	475	147	2352		\$ 193,151.00
1982	\$ 46,691,799.00	0.0015575	\$ 55,890.03	\$ 30,050.00	\$ 101,301.00	477	147	2413		\$ 185,608.00
1983	\$ 49,684,400.00	0.0013555	\$ 48,486.78	\$ 30,432.00	\$ 109,978.00	477	147	2439		\$ 219,394.00
1984	\$ 51,838,600.00	0.0013308	\$ 47,996.48	\$ 25,498.00	\$ 110,685.00	477	147	2374		\$ 211,794.00
1985	\$ 48,932,800.00	0.000960762	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 26,213.00	\$ 116,000.00	485	147	2299		\$ 218,833.00
1986	\$ 42,999,300.00	0.000815987	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 28,803.00	\$ 120,749.00	487	147	2304		\$ 235,753.00
1987	\$ 40,455,700.00	0.00061277	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 31,650.00	\$ 126,124.00	490	147	2276		\$ 265,397.00
1988	\$ 40,200,100.00	0.000361882	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 35,745.00	\$ 136,271.27	498	147	2245		\$ 218,578.00
1989	\$ 42,018,300.00	0.000353694	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 38,604.60	\$ 144,463.22	504	147	2248		\$ 223,959.00
1990	\$ 43,865,100.00	0.000345965	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 44,037.00	\$ 143,933.14	508	147	2175		\$ 247,236.00
1991	\$ 45,630,200.00	0.000341245	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 48,930.00	\$ 142,934.09	511	147	2183		\$ 254,686.00
1992	\$ 47,941,600.00	0.000333194	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 53,823.00	\$ 143,128.16	519	147	2197		\$ 254,658.00
1993	\$ 51,818,455.00	0.000326203	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 58,716.00	\$ 140,578.22					\$ 241,435.00
1994	\$ 55,125,100.00	0.000315646	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 62,385.75	\$ 138,344.17	547	147	2131		\$ 279,897.00
1995	\$ 59,703,700.00	0.000265702	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 67,081.50	\$ 140,551.92	559	147	2154		\$ 252,541.00
1996	\$ 62,180,600.00	0.000255242	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 69,069.10	\$ 143,470.80	569	147	2162		\$ 276,278.00
1997	\$ 67,550,800.00	0.000249832	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 71,471.12	\$ 146,778.51	579	147	2154	63	\$ 261,812.00
1998	\$ 74,931,600.00	0.000239662	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 79,656.00	\$ 145,442.00	587	147	2196	68	\$ 286,629.00
1999	\$ 81,493,200.00	0.000710724	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 79,464.84	\$ 138,520.12	592	147	2198	69	\$ 522,987.00
2000	\$ 83,812,700.00	0.000558288	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 84,842.16	\$ 134,306.36	601	151	2234	70	\$ 472,142.00
2001	\$ 90,472,100.00	0.000981144	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 84,842.15	\$ 137,977.80	609	151	2088	69	\$ 411,059.00
2002	\$ 94,485,500.00	0.000996646	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 88,943.40	\$ 139,308.09	616	150	2091	71	\$ 376,517.00
2003	\$ 104,189,000.00	0.000980357	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 93,129.75	\$ 140,701.17	630	148	2094	74	\$ 425,214.00
2004	\$ 110,990,300.00	0.001442125	\$ 120,000.00	\$ 95,484.00	\$ 112,257.34	641	148	2106	74	\$ 402,240.00
2005	\$ 130,644,400.00	0.000891293	\$ 120,000.00	\$ 96,287.00	\$ 112,257.34	651	149	2106	76	\$ 420,900.00
2006	\$ 137,142,100.00	0.000891264	\$ 122,500.00	\$ 98,537.04	\$ 112,257.34	665	150	2138	76	\$ 399,794.00
2007	\$ 141,014,052.00	0.000886436	\$ 125,000.00	\$ 100,893.87	\$ 112,257.34	676	150	2151	76	\$ 474,061.00
2008	\$ 154,016,800.00	0.00122251	\$ 175,000.00	\$ 103,922.28	\$ 112,257.34	682	150	2164	78	\$ 621,709.00
2009	\$ 156,172,000.00	0.000922253	\$ 135,370.00	\$ 107,379.35	\$ 139,618.48					\$ 502,567.00
2010	\$ 155,569,000.00	0.001592512	\$ 238,146.00	\$ 109,510.95	\$ 100,342.92					\$ 941,222.00
2011	\$ 162,912,900.00	0.001971776	\$ 301,106.04	\$ 112,814.92	\$ 100,327.21					\$ 653,464.00
2012	\$ 161,070,900.00	0.00192672	\$ 302,929.88	\$ 113,111.31	\$ 83,693.71					\$ 837,986.00





"Wisconsin's Milk Moo-ver"

CHAIR
Jerrold Schroeder
Schroeder Milk Transit

VICE CHAIR
Tim Neubauer
Tim Neubauer Trucking

Testimony in support of Assembly Bill 244
Assembly Committee on Transportation
May 23, 2023

Chair VanderMeer and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and share our support for Assembly Bill 244.

My name is Dan Johnson and I am the Vice President of the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association as well as the Administrator for the Wisconsin Milk Haulers Association. The WMHA has been the statewide advocate for the milk hauling industry since 1957.

Each month, milk haulers move more than 2.4 billion pounds of raw milk from Wisconsin's 6,500 dairy farms to one of many processing plants. Milk haulers are a key component of Wisconsin's \$26.5 billion dairy industry and must ensure the transport of raw milk from farm to processor is performed in a safe, efficient and timely manner.

Milk is a necessary food product which is transported 365 days a year with an expectation of no stoppage. However, during the spring months, seasonal weight limits place restrictions on milk haulers' ability to effectively move product from the farms to the processors. Those restrictions are further exacerbated by long wait times at the plants, winter weather conditions, and a continued problem of finding enough drivers to haul milk.

Wisconsin is 'America's Dairyland' and consumers rely on dairy products to be readily available in grocery store and restaurants. We have all witnessed supply chain issues over the last few years that have crippled the state and national economy. It would be extremely detrimental to Wisconsin's economy and image if milk and dairy products were added to the growing list of supplies less available to consumers. Those challenges are the reason why this legislation is necessary.

Under AB 244, any road used for agricultural purposes which is improved and upgraded through the grant program could not be posted with weight restrictions. To paraphrase a recent comment by a Wisconsin dairy farmer, the trucks are not too heavy for roads, the roads are not built well enough for the trucks. This critical funding legislation is needed if Wisconsin is to remain as 'America's Dairyland' and keep milk moving from farm, to processor, to consumers throughout the year.

The Wisconsin Milk Haulers Association appreciates the efforts of the authors and co-sponsors of this legislation and hopes this committee will give it all due consideration and eventual support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Johnson".

Dan Johnson
Administrator, Wisconsin Milk Haulers Association
562 Grand Canyon Drive
Madison, WI 53719



**Wisconsin Dairy Alliance and Venture Dairy Cooperative Testimony in Support of Senate
Bill 247/Assembly Bill 244**
Assembly Committee on Transportation
May 23, 2023

Dear Chair VanderMeer, Vice-Chair Hurd and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of AB 244.

Wisconsin Dairy Alliance represents modern regulated dairy farms in Wisconsin and works diligently to preserve Wisconsin's heritage as the Dairy State. Venture Dairy Cooperative works to combat unnecessary regulations, reduce government bureaucracy and advance smart policy to support the future of dairy farmers in Wisconsin.

A grant program like that proposed in this legislation is critical for farmers. Our organizations sincerely thank the authors of this legislation for putting forward a bill that strikes a fair balance between the interests of all impacted by poor road conditions. This bill is a win for local government, your constituents, farmers, haulers, processors and the dairy industry as a whole.

This bill benefits farmers in two ways, logistically and economically.

Farmers rely on roads in good condition to haul manure, feed, equipment to barns or fields, but our members also rely on good road conditions so that their milk haulers can travel freely.

The process of getting milk, a perishable commodity, from farmer to processor requires logistical precision. **Any delay, whether from poor road conditions or posted weight limits requiring alternative routes or additional hauling conditions can result in increased costs and a spoiled product or farmers dumping milk.** This bill helps ensure that this does not happen.

Our organizations are involved in a number of local issues involving our members, many of which involve road postings, overweight permitting, and fees for road use. The topic of road conditions is part of nearly every county or town meeting. When funding is not available to fix these roads, it necessarily causes finger pointing, strained relationships between farmers and their local representatives, permanent posting, and no tangible road improvement in the end.

This bill would help alleviate this consistent predicament by providing a more permanent solution to the problem and help to ensure Wisconsin remains the Dairy State.

For these reasons we urge the committee to support this bill. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me at (608) 291-7504 or lane@ruhlandlaw.com.



Executive Committee:

Troy Brown President Antigo, WI	Aaron Burmeister WI Vice President Seymour, WI	Mike Elenz MI Vice President Gaylord, MI	Dave Johnson Secretary/Treasurer Quinnesec, MI	Guy Longhini Member at Large Toivola, MI	Mark Huempfer Member at Large Wausaukee, WI	Matt Jensen Past President Crandon, WI	Henry Schienebeck Executive Director Rhineland, WI
--	---	---	---	---	--	---	---

Board of Directors:

Jeff Bean
Arpin, WI

Chad Benz
Merrill, WI

Bill Brand
Newberry, MI

Laura Delaney
Warrens, WI

Paul Doruska
Plover, WI

Bruce "Sparky" Enstrom
Menominee, MI

Max Ericson
Minong, WI

Travis Heikkinen
Gwinn, MI

Scott Koerner
Oshkosh, WI

Tim Lee
Mellen, WI

Rebekah Luedtke
Rhineland, WI

Todd Penrose
Ishpeming, MI

Brad Peot
Madison, WI

Todd Pond
Tomahawk, WI

Mike Sturgill
Onaway, MI

Warren Suchovsky
Stephenson, MI

Allan Suzan
Ojibwa, WI

Justin Yelle
Gwinn, MI

DJ Zellar
Germfask, MI

Assembly Committee on Transportation
Representative Nancy VanderMeer (Chair)
Room 11 West
P.O. Box 8953
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

Re: Assembly Bill 244

Chair VanderMeer and Committee Members,

My name is Henry Schienebeck, Executive Director for Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA) and I am here to testify in favor of AB 244 as amended to solidify the inclusion of forestry transportation. GLTPA is a 501C (6) non-profit, two state (MI WI) organization representing over 1,000 members and their 14,000 employees. Membership includes loggers, log truckers, foresters, and landowners, sawmills, oriented strand board mills, pulp and paper mills, sportsmen and women, equipment sales/manufacturers, road commissions, and school districts throughout Michigan and Wisconsin.

For several years past GLTPA has had the privilege of serving as a member of the Town Road Improvement Discretionary (TRID) Committee. As a part of the process every application is reviewed, scored, compared with other committee member scores, then reviewed by the entire committee with final approval going to a handful of recipients. Over the years applications have increased dramatically with last year being a record with over 450 applications. Many applications were for structural improvement for bridges and culverts. The need has never been greater.

What forest managers do best is provide products for daily life and connecting a managed forest to a managed climate. First, it takes a healthy forest with healthy trees and trained loggers to implement sustainable forest plans to ensure we never run out of trees and the ability to use them. Second it requires a reliable infrastructure and that's where you can help. Like agriculture, the forest industry relies extensively on a rural infrastructure to get raw material to industries in many of your districts. Weight limits and posted structures have made it very costly to transport fiber in terms of extra fuel due to detours and lack of access to the shortest routes for efficiency. Without efficient roads, transportation costs increase and competitiveness in global markets shrinks.

In addition to creating efficiencies, AB 244 addresses industry concerns regarding accountability with the inclusion of provisions to ensure restrictions are removed once roads and structures are improved. During my time on the TRID Committee there was more than one debate about withholding funding from a project which did not provide relief from a weight limit.

In closing GLTPA appreciates the effort to improve the rural infrastructure with funding, a simplified application, and accountability for money spent on projects,

Thank you for the opportunity,


Henry Schienebeck



DAIRY BUSINESS
ASSOCIATION | DAIRY
FORWARD

May 23, 2023

Assembly Committee on Transportation

Testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 244

Good morning madam Chair, Ranking Member Considine and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Assembly Bill 244.

My name is Chad Zuleger. I am director of government affairs representing the Dairy Business Association. Our membership includes dairy farmers, processors and a variety of affiliated businesses combined to ensure producers are successful in our state and that the products they produce remain delicious, nutritious, and available worldwide.


Agricultural roads and bridges are essential infrastructure for connecting farms to markets and processing facilities. Roads and bridges are also essential in bringing feed, equipment, and other services to and from the farm. Unfortunately, many of these roads have been neglected and are in dire need of repair. This bill would provide much-needed resources for repairing and improving these critical agricultural roads, which would benefit not only agricultural producers but also the entire state's economy.

I appear today to express DBA's strong support for Assembly Bill 244, which aims to establish an agricultural road improvement grant program under the Department of Transportation (DOT). This program will play a vital role in improving the infrastructure that connects agricultural lands to local roads, bridges, and culverts, benefitting both agricultural producers and the overall economy.

Agriculture is a cornerstone of our state's economy, and the efficient transportation of agricultural goods is crucial for its continued growth and prosperity. However, many of our agricultural roads and bridges suffer from structural deficiencies that lead to weight limitations, hindering the productivity and economic potential of our agricultural community.

By enacting a grant program that reimburses up to 100 percent of the costs for eligible projects, AB 244 will help address structural deficiencies and ensure that agricultural roads are no longer subject to weight limitations, except under extraordinary or emergency circumstances. This improvement will enable producers to transport their goods more efficiently and effectively, benefiting the entire agricultural community.

I commend the bill's provision that prioritizes projects based on several important criteria. By prioritizing projects that improve access for the largest number of agricultural producers and those that make improvements to the oldest agricultural roads, the program will have a



significant positive impact on the industry. Additionally, projects resulting in the largest reduction in deferred or repeated trips, as well as those with the greatest positive economic impact, will further enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of our agricultural sector.

Furthermore, the bill recognizes the challenges faced by political subdivisions in completing highway projects. By allowing the DOT and, with agreement, counties to act as fiscal agents for grantee political subdivisions, AB 244 ensures that grant funds can be efficiently utilized, and projects can be completed promptly. This provision is particularly crucial for towns, enabling them to benefit from the program as well.

In conclusion, I urge you to support Assembly Bill 244 and help to establish an agricultural road improvement grant program that will provide critical resources to support the success of agricultural producers in our state. Thank you for your consideration.



Tuesday May 23rd, 2023

Assembly Committee on Transportation

Re: Assembly Bill 244: Relating to: an agricultural roads improvement grant program and making an appropriation.

Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Chair VanderMeer and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 244.

Wisconsin Farmers Union's grassroots, member-driven policy reads:

“Local roads are the backbone for Wisconsin commerce and industry, stimulate growth and promote a healthy economy. The percentage of state transportation funds devoted to local road projects is shrinking. The overall size of the state Transportation Fund is also shrinking because motorists are driving less, driving more fuel efficient cars, buying fewer gallons of gasoline and paying less in gasoline taxes. Local governments are subject to tight levy limits on local levies, and state shared revenue has been cut for local governments, which further restricts the local governments' ability to fund local road maintenance. For these reasons, Wisconsin Farmers Union supports a general fund for increasing funding for road projects”

Wisconsin Farmers Union submits testimony today in favor of Assembly Bill 244, relating to the agricultural roads improvement grant program. This state-funded program to upgrade local roads and bridges, improves the critical link between farmers and business. Wisconsin Farmers Union is an organization of farmers and rural residents, and thus many of our members rely on rural roads, while this bill would address one of the biggest hurdles farmers face, it would benefit all rural road users.

Crumbling and aging infrastructure in rural Wisconsin results in weight or hauling restrictions, and alternative route or partial load requirements. These issues are currently exasperated by driver shortages and higher fuel prices. This restricts Wisconsin's \$107 billion a year agriculture industry. These infrastructure problems contribute to a strain on our food supply.

Thank you for this opportunity to share Wisconsin Farmers Union's thoughts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union



Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary
4822 Madison Yards Way, S903
Madison, WI 53705

Governor Tony Evers
Secretary Craig Thompson
wisconsindot.gov
Telephone: (608) 266-1114
FAX: (608) 266-9912
Email: sec.exec@dot.wi.gov

Testimony of Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Assistant Deputy Secretary Joel Nilsestuen
Before the Assembly Committee on Transportation
May 23, 2023

Re: Assembly Bill 244, relating to an agricultural roads improvement grant program and making an appropriation.

WisDOT appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony for informational purposes. We also appreciate the continued engagement with the bill authors and stakeholders to craft this legislation.

This bill requires the department to create a new Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP) aimed at improving agricultural transportation facilities that are roadways functionally classified as minor collectors or local roads, and bridges or culverts on said roadways. To be considered eligible, a facility must provide access to agricultural lands used to produce agricultural goods and must be used by more than one agricultural producer. Additionally, these facilities must display structural deficiencies resulting in weight limitation postings at least annually.

The department sees many positive aspects in the substitute amendment. Over the past several sessions and budgets, we appreciate the cooperative work done to address system needs in rural areas. However, there remain several concerns with SB 247 to consider. These concerns could lead to negative consequences for both ARIP and the state's Discretionary Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP-D).

The amended language does not create a new appropriation for ARIP and is written such that projects must be funded out of s. 20.395(2)(ft), which funds LRIP-D. The department believes this will result in the two programs competing against each other for funding. Additionally, the two programs allow different levels of cost share participation. LRIP-D provides reimbursement of not more than 50 percent of the eligible project costs. ARIP would provide reimbursement of not more than 100 percent of eligible project costs. Given ARIP's ability to reimburse at much higher levels, the department is concerned it could quickly consume much of the program funding.

The ability for a local government to request reimbursement up to 100 percent of eligible project costs creates other concerns. The department understands participating costs are a barrier for many small governments, especially those in rural areas. However, participating in the cost of an improvement project encourages adherence to practical design standards and reduces the potential for inflated project scopes. To mitigate for this, the department may need to perform an expanded application review or establish clear standards for the program. Both could slow implementation of the program.

Finally, given that ARIP has important differences that set it apart from LRIP-D, the department would need to establish a separate process for soliciting applications, selecting projects, and providing reimbursement. LRIP-D, and its Supplemental and Entitlement counterparts, provide reasonable frameworks that can be copied, but a new program administration system would need to be created and administered by staff. The department would need additional resources to ensure the system was built correctly and administered effectively. The department may also need to partner with other state agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection or the Department of Revenue, to better capture programmatic needs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this written testimony today. The Agricultural Road Improvement Program provides an opportunity to address needs on local transportation facilities that support one of Wisconsin's most important industries. We would stand ready to continue working with the bill authors and the committee to develop language to address these concerns. Thank you for your time and consideration.