



CALVIN CALLAHAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 35

Office: (608) 237-9135
Toll Free: (888) 534-0035

Rep.Callahan@legis.wi.gov
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708-8952

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 649

Assembly Committee on Transportation

January 30, 2024

Madame Chair and members of the committee, I sincerely appreciate you holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 649. This important legislation will ease the burden on our local governments and strengthen a Wisconsin pastime statewide.

Under current state statutes, town roads must be maintained as passable at all times. In theory, this is a reasonable law to have in place during the winter months. However, across the state, towns with low road maintenance budgets have been forced to plow and maintain roads with zero residences or businesses along them. This can be very difficult for small municipalities in rural areas, especially in a year with lots of heavy snowfall. If they do not continue to maintain them, these towns are at risk of lawsuits and losing road funding from the state. In many cases, the clearing of these roads also shortens the snowmobile season and cuts off routes to businesses that thrive on snowmobile traffic during the winter.

Our proposal gives towns the authority to create a new designation of roadway, known as "seasonally maintained highways." From December 15th to March 31st, the town is not required to maintain the road as passable and will not be held liable for any accident that occurs along a posted highway. In consultation with DOT, we ensured that proper signage is required to be posted to alert motorists. Importantly, a town will not lose any general transportation aid as a result of designating any portion of roadway as a seasonally maintained highway. The full criteria by which a roadway is eligible to be designated is outlined in the bill.

This bill will provide the flexibility towns need to provide vital services during the winter months. Additionally, it will help stimulate local economies through increased snowmobile traffic. Thank you again for holding this public hearing.



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

January 30, 2024

Assembly Committee on Transportation Testimony on Assembly Bill 649

Good Morning!

Thank you Chair VanderMeer and committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 649 (AB 649) that allows a town to designate a road under its jurisdiction as a seasonally maintained highway.

AB 649 gives towns the authority to create a new designation of roadway as a “seasonally maintained highway”. This designation would be applicable from December 15th through March 31st, and the town would not be required to maintain the road as passable.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) administers the general transportation aids program that makes payments to municipalities based on the greater of a share-of-costs formula or an aid rate per each mile of highway. As part of the calculation for the aid-rate-per-mile, the municipality must file a plat with DOT, showing the highways under its jurisdiction. Under the bill, if DOT determines the highway meets the requirements, it must be included in the computation for general transportation aid.

The bill outlines the criteria by which a roadway may be designated, if all of the following apply:

- 1) Must already be designated as a snowmobile route.
- 2) Must not be the sole means of access to a residence, a private parcel containing improvements, an improved boat landing, or a lake larger than 20 acres.
- 3) May not be the sole means of access to a business or private parcel that does not contain improvements unless the business or parcel owner agrees in writing to the designation of the highway.
- 4) The remaining maintained highways must provide for the most direct access to residences.

Passing this legislation will help towns with minimal road maintenance budgets that have been forced to plow roads with zero residences or businesses along them. In addition, plowing the roads may shorten the snowmobile season, and sometimes cuts off routes that connect to businesses that thrive on snowmobile traffic in the winter.

Thank you again for hearing AB 649, and your timely action on this proposal.

To: Assembly Committee on Transportation

From: Debra Uhlenbrauck, Chute Pond Snowmobile Club, Mountain, Wisconsin

Date: January 30, 2024

RE: Support of AB 649, relating to seasonally maintained highways

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of AB 649.

My name is Debra Uhlenbrauck, I am the President of Chute Pond Snowmobile Club in Mountain. I am also the Secretary of the Oconto County Snowmobile Alliance and Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Club's Oconto County Director.

I have been snowmobiling for over 50 years. My father allowed a snowmobile trail to cross his farmland. I have witnessed and experienced the challenges clubs face making connecting routes from one club to another. Wisconsin has over 25,000 miles of trails that support economic growth to small business by promoting tourism. Oconto County (my home county) has 480 miles of trails.

I support AB 649 because the Chute Pond Snowmobile Club has road routes, as do many other clubs throughout the state. I work closely with town officials to ensure safety. Road routes are utilized because there is no other connection possible. AB 649 would give the Town officials an opportunity to allow snow on road routes. I promote tourism to small business and work to create an enjoyable rider experience for all snowmobilers. I feel this legislation will have a positive impact on tourism, and increase the economic impact snowmobiling has on the state.

Thank you, Representative Callahan and Senator Marklein and all the sponsors, for introducing AB 649, and for identifying an issue and finding a workable solution to help make a difference.

I support AB 649. Thank you and I will try to answer any questions that you may have.



Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs – AWSC

529Trail Side Dr., Suite 200 – DeForest, WI 53532
Phone: 800.232.4108 / 608.846.5530 – Fax: 608.846.5534
Web: www.awsc.org / Email: awsc@awsc.org

To: Assembly Committee on Transportation
From: Sam Landes, AWSC Legislative Committee Chair
Date: January 30, 2024
RE: AWSC Support of AB 649, relating to seasonally maintained highways

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of AB 649.

My name is Sam Landes, and I am the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Club's Dane County Director, and the AWSC's Legislative Committee Chairman.

Having been involved with organized snowmobiling for over 35 years, I cannot overstate the importance of the relationships our local AWSC volunteer clubs have with their local towns in regard to keeping our 25,000 miles of snowmobile trails connected.

Sometimes we need to place snowmobile trail routes on roadways as a way to keep our system connected. Some of those routes or sections of those routes are located on roads that do not see any motor vehicle traffic during the snow season. Some of those routes or sections of routes could be left un-plowed in the winter, as there are alternate road routes for vehicles to access those area properties in question during the snow season.

It is my understanding that the towns have to maintain those roads year around to receive their state maintenance aids. Therefore, the identifiable snowmobile road routes that AB649 would affect, get plowed to the hard surface while never seeing any vehicle traffic during the snow season. I think it's pretty safe to say that a snowmobile operates way safer and easier on snow, rather than pavement! And that many of the roads in question see way more snowmobile traffic in the winter than they will see by motor vehicles the whole rest of the year.

AB 649 will allow the local towns a process to decide and approve to not plow roads or sections of roads that do not require winter vehicle access without the threat of losing their DOT Transportation maintenance aids during the rest of the year.

We thank Representative Callahan and Senator Marklein and all sponsors for introducing AB 649. To us, this is common-sense legislation, and on behalf of the AWSC, we support it.

Thank you and will try to answer any questions from committee members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam Landes".

Sam Landes
AWSC Legislative Committee Chair
AWSC Director-Dane County