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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 60TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Assembly Committee on Transportation
Tuesday, January 20, 2024

Chairman VanderMeer and members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation, thank you for affording me with the opportunity to testify on behalf of Assembly Bill 808, relating to supervision of local bill projects funded under the bridge maintenance fund.

A township in the 60th Assembly District brought this issue to my attention and suggested drafting legislation to address issues related to the bridge maintenance fund.

For decades, Wisconsin townships have utilized two infrastructure programs simultaneously to assist with the refurbishment of dilapidated bridges:

- Wis. Stat. 8418, the Local Bridge Program, which allows townships to obtain state funds for eighty percent of the cost of the project.
- Wis. Stat. 82.08, the Petition for County Aid, which allows townships to petition the county for fifty percent of the cost of construction or repair of any bridge or culvert on or connected to a town highway.

Townships would initially receive eighty percent state funding for the project, and then would split the remaining twenty percent between themselves and the county. The aforementioned funding structure allowed townships to rapidly repair failing bridges that otherwise would have to wait years to be repaired.

A 2023 attorney general opinion found that this longstanding practice might not be legal. As such, townships have had to postpone crucial projects as projected construction costs have, in most cases, increased exponentially.

Assembly Bill 808 seeks to address this oversight by codifying into statute the precedent that the two infrastructure programs may be used simultaneously to help cover local bridge projects. Doing so would allow failing and/or dilapidate bridges to be repaired in an accelerated fashion without fear of adversely affecting township budgets.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.



January 30th, 2024

Representative VanderMeer, Chair
Representative Hurd, Vice-Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 808

Relating to: supervision of local bridge projects funded under certain local bridge maintenance programs

Dear Chairwomen VanderMeer and Committee Members:

For decades, Wisconsin townships have utilized two local infrastructure programs together to help refurbish seriously deteriorating bridges:

- s. 84.18 Local Bridge Program – Allows townships to get state funds for 80% of the cost of the project
- s. 82.08 Petition for county aid – Allows townships to petition the county for 50% of the cost of construction or repair of any bridge or culvert on or connected to a town highway

Townships would initially receive the 80% state funding for the project, and then they would split the remaining 20% between themselves and their county. This funding structure allowed townships to rapidly repair failing bridges that otherwise would have to wait years to be fixed.

Unfortunately, it came to light early last year in an Attorney General opinion that this longstanding practice may in fact not be legal. Townships have since had to postpone crucial projects as their projected construction costs increased substantially.

Assembly Bill 808 seeks to address this oversight by codifying into statute the precedent that the two programs can be used together to help cover local bridge projects. This move would allow failing bridges to be repaired in an accelerated fashion without fear of ballooning township budgets.

Thank you again for your time. I am happy to take any questions.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District