

# State of Wisconsin \ Elections Board

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**DATE:** Friday, April 29, 2005

**TO:** Members of the Legislative Council Special Committee  
on Election Law Review

**FROM:** Kevin J. Kennedy, Executive Director  
Wisconsin State Elections Board

**SUBJECT:** Vote by Mail Survey and Results

The staff of the Wisconsin State Elections Board executed the "Vote by Mail" Survey from March 29, 2005 to April 11, 2005. The survey was sent to municipal clerks electronically using the Municipal Clerks Listserv. Additionally, the staff contacted all county clerks electronically, requesting assistance in administering the survey to municipal clerks who had not responded before election night (April 5, 2005).

As of April 13, 2005, the Elections Board received 590 completed surveys either by fax, phone conversation or through Zoomerang (an on-line survey).

**Provided Attachments:**

Attachment A: Survey on Vote by Mail

Attachment B: Cross Tabulation of Results

Attachment C: Question 8: Would you support implementing "Vote by Mail" for all municipalities?

Yes - 113 (11 comments)

No - 477 ( 47 comments)

Attachment D: Question 9: If municipalities are given the choice, would you implement "Vote by Mail" in your municipality?

Yes - 122 (random selection of 15)

No - 468 (random selection of 15)

Comments have been edited for spelling and clarity. Further results (including comments) are available upon request.

For further information contact Kevin J. Kennedy at (608) 266-8087 or Faith Edgren (608) 266-2094.

# ATTACHMENT A

## Survey on “Vote by Mail”

## Survey on Vote by Mail

The Legislative Council Special Committee on Election Law Review has been considering a variety of policies and procedures. One of the procedures which has been **proposed** is to allow municipalities the option to go to elections which are conducted exclusively through the mail. The proposed procedures for a "vote by mail" election are outlined below as well as some of the positive and negative aspects of such an election. After reviewing this proposal, please take a few minutes to answer the following survey questions and comment on this proposal. Your answers will be reviewed by the Committee as they research this issue.

Please complete the survey online at:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/survey.zgi?p=WEB2248PV2VUTK>

**Please complete the survey by Monday, April 11, 2005.**

### **Vote by Mail Election Procedures**

The new statewide voter registration system will allow labels of eligible voters in a municipality to be printed.

1. 30 days before an election, the clerk mails a ballot to each registered voter in his or her municipality. The ballot will be enclosed in the same certificate envelope used for absentee ballots. The clerk pays the postage for the ballot to be sent, but not the return postage.
2. Voters either return their completed ballots to secure ballot drop off points in a municipality, such as a clerk's office or a library, or they mail their completed ballot back to the clerk. Voters may also come into the clerk's office to register and receive a ballot.
3. On election day, at a designated location, electors may still drop off their completed ballots. Poll workers process the ballots during the day (i.e., checking that the certificate envelope has the required signatures, opening the ballot and placing it in the ballot box or machine).
4. After 8:00 p.m., the ballots are counted. In municipalities with paper ballots, the ballots are hand counted. In municipalities with machines, the tapes are run, and the write-in votes are tallied.

### Items in Discussion

The proposed procedures below have not been finalized, but will be addressed if vote by mail elections are implemented.

- Individuals who are on vacation and need to have their ballot sent to an address outside of the municipality.
- If permitted, voting on election day, where and how it would take place.

Positive Aspects

- Increased voter turn out
- Small municipalities can save money by not having to hire poll workers for the entire day.
- The HAVA (Help America Vote Act) requirement for an accessible polling place and accessible voting equipment will be waived.

Negative Aspects

- Some community members enjoy the opportunity election day provides to meet people within their community.
- Issues arising when a voter changes their mind after they have returned their ballot.

Please contact Faith Edgren (608-266-2094, [faith.edgren@seb.state.wi.us](mailto:faith.edgren@seb.state.wi.us)) or Sutton Meagher (608-266-3061, [sutton.meagher@seb.state.wi.us](mailto:sutton.meagher@seb.state.wi.us)) with any questions you may have.

## Voting by Mail

1

Municipality:

2

County:

3

HINDI Number: (Your HINDI number can be found at <http://elections.state.wi.us> under Clerks Corner.)

4

Name of person completing survey:

5

Position:

6

Phone Number:

7

What is the estimated population of your municipality?

☒ Less than 1,000

- ☐ 1,000-5,000
- ☐ 5,001-10,000
- ☐ 10,001-39,000
- ☐ 39,001-150,000
- ☐ More than 150,001

8

Would you support implementing "Vote by Mail" for all municipalities?

Why or why not

9

If municipalities are given the choice, would you implement "Vote by Mail" in your municipality?

Why or why not

10

In your municipality, what are the largest problems/challenges you foresee with the "Vote by Mail" proposal?

11

Any other comments which you believe the Committee should consider? An appropriate answer can be 'none' or 'N/A'.



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# ATTACHMENT B

## Cross Tabulation of Results



## VOTE BY MAIL Survey

Cross Tabulation Results

Completed surveys only

April 14, 2005

**Would you support implementing "Vote by Mail" for all municipalities?:**

	Total	What is the estimated population of your municipality?:					
		Less than 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-39,000	39,001-150,000	More than 150,001
Total	590	247	230	43	56	14	0
Yes	113	48 19.4%	37 16.1%	10 23.3%	12 21.4%	6 42.9%	0 0%
No	477	199 80.6%	193 83.9%	33 76.7%	44 78.6%	8 57.1%	0 0%

**If municipalities are given the choice, would you implement "Vote by Mail" in your municipality? :**

	Total	What is the estimated population of your municipality?:					
		Less than 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-39,000	39,001-150,000	More than 150,001
Total	590	247	230	43	56	14	0
Yes	122	45 18.2%	47 20.4%	11 25.6%	13 23.2%	6 42.9%	0 0%
No	468	202 81.8%	183 79.6%	32 74.4%	43 76.8%	8 57.1%	0 0%

## ATTACHMENT C

Question 8: Would you Support  
Implementing “Vote by Mail” for all  
municipalities?

**Question 8: Would you support implementing "Vote by Mail" for all municipalities?**

**Yes Comments:**

- 1) If the system is found to be reliable, I would think about implementing it. Currently on election day, we sometimes get a lot of angry voters.
- 2) At the spring primary, the City did not have any contested races, so my three poll workers sat from 9 am to 8 pm for 19 voters, at a cost of \$10.27 per voter.
- 3) I think that it would draw more votes then we are getting now.
- 4) I would also support a vote-early machine or some type of voting electronically early. I feel that I am already sending out 400 absentee ballots and ordering materials for people who don't show at the polls. I think it would increase participation, but I do have concerns about security. I think that it would make elections easier for the working families.
- 5) Cost savings and ease of administration
- 6) No comment
- 7) Greater voter participation. Lower costs to municipality especially if mandated to have polls open at 7:00 am.
- 8) Possibly, depending upon how the statewide voter registration software works. We now are able to merge information into all the fields on the absentee certificate by computer which saves a lot of time getting absentee ballots ready for sending out.
- 9) More people would be inclined to vote.
- 10) Would provide consistency throughout the state
- 11) More freedom for voters.

## No Comments:

- 1) Too high a risk of persons getting to vote numerous times by convincing uninterested registered voters to let them vote their ballot.
- 2) More expensive to do
- 3) Additional cost to municipality; increased chance of others knowing who you voted for; increased chance of voter fraud.
- 4) I believe that those that wish to exercise their right to vote will. To go to the expense of mailing ballots to ALL registered voters for each and every election when sometimes the turnout of voters has been less than 5% is foolish. There still would be the expense of workers to publicly open the ballots and process them, so you're not saving any money there either. If I thought that there would be a better response from the public, I would think that the cost would be justified, but I really don't think that that would be the case.
- 5) I think it just adds more responsibility on the clerk during elections. It takes time to address all the envelopes.
- 6) With 18,000+ registered voters and a staff of 1 1/2 (including the Clerk), it would be IMPOSSIBLE to send 18,000 ballots by mail not to mention the enormous cost!!!!
- 7) I don't feel it would be cost effective for larger communities.
- 8) You may save on poll worker costs, but you would have additional office staff cost with processing all of this information. You will also have additional printing costs if the same envelopes are used as for an absentee ballot today. Then if people forget to sign the envelope the ballot would be rejected. With a potential of 2000 registered voters in Marshall, this process doesn't seem very cost effective in my mind.
- 9) There are too many issues to be considered.
- 10) Each municipality is unique and should be able to determine which method would work best for itself.
- 11) No Comment
- 12) Excessive Cost of postage and envelopes; folded ballots pose problem with machine jamming and reading correctly; cleaner election with people placing their votes at the polls; mailing ballots generate extreme amount of paperwork.
- 13) Most clerk positions are part-time and do not allow for or compensate the positions for the additional work this would involve. There are too many unknowns to adequately address this at this time on a local level.
- 14) My position is only part-time elected official - much more work required by the Town Clerk; ok if you want to pay for the expenses.

15) Many of our elderly voters come to visit with other persons in the community, and this would deprive them of some of the only contact they get.

16) No comment

17) Time, energy and cost of mailing out ballots - how many more trees will it take ? Too labor intensive, and we would still have to staff the polls on election day.

18) Would remove local options

19) IT SHOULD BE UP TO THE INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES

20) Opens a Pandora's box of potential voter fraud. No Controls. There would be more potential for voter fraud than there is currently. How would the clerk know if the person really voted and if that was their signature? What if someone dies, and the clerk receives a ballot back from that voter and it is counted? Where is the security? People do not keep their addresses up-to-date. People would not put the return postage on the envelopes, and the municipalities would have to pay for this. There is a process in place for shut-ins to vote absentee now, and some of them enjoy having someone come in to help them. Also the old heritage and tradition to "go to the polling place" meant you can visit with people and talk for a while after you vote. I feel there would not be a significant increase in voter turnout with this provision. Also I feel voters would make errors, and the municipalities would have more rejected ballots, or the poll workers would be remaking more ballots due to errors. What would people do if they were not registered and could not vote? They would not be very happy with the clerk or the poll workers.

21) It's a lot of work for the clerk. It's good to have interaction on election day with other people in the village.

22) I believe you are at a high risk of voter fraud. I believe it would cost the municipality more money, not less. More work for clerk.

23) The added hours and burden of mailing would not be offset by the savings. The potential of getting ballots misplaced or lost in the shuffle is too great. (Isn't even 1-2 too much) The loss of privacy for the voter should be of grave concern to HAVA and others who want everyone to have that right.

24) This is not a feasible option! Many towns do not have full-time clerks able to spend the time necessary for such a mass mailing or a secure location for drop off of ballots. A few absentee ballots handled by clerks out of their homes is one thing, but the entire population voting by absentee ballot is not secure enough.

25) Not cost effective

26) Fraud

- 27) Would be very costly (postage, supplies), much extra work, most of which would be wasted by people not returning materials.
- 28) The cost for postage (one way) would be \$7,000. Plus, we'd have the cost of the extra envelopes, extra ballots, etc. We would still have to have personnel to handle the ballots on election day plus the overtime of my staff to mail out all the forms. There would be additional postage to return all those that are received back without signature and address of witness.
- 29) Added expense and I doubt it would improve voter participation.
- 30) Not practical
- 31) We have the absentee process - it works in my township.
- 32) This would be like a massive absentee voter mailing. I am the only person in my office and would have to have someone come in to help or do the mailing. Would ballots only go out to those who registered? What about new voters? I think this tends to infringe on your right to vote at your polling place. My election inspectors do not feel this would be a good idea. Voting is a sense of community.
- 33) In many cases, coming to the polls is the only contact residents have with their local government. Also, if people wait until the last minute to return their ballots, many will not be received on time to be counted. Also, I believe this would allow fraud - who knows who really used the ballot?
- 34) Too expensive - we find people don't return surveys - voter fraud
- 35) Voter fraud in other areas - also the way it is now works great.
- 36) Cost - time involved - voter fraud
- 37) Too confusing for older people
- 38) 1- more work for clerk, 2- office is out of home, 3- another added expense to village
- 39) No comment
- 40) Don't need - one fits all
- 41) No security in this idea
- 42) Mailing cost would be too high. Voters like to place their own ballots in the machine. Voter trust issues would arise. It is unnecessary. It would complicate a system that is working perfectly well in the Village of Fontana and throughout most of the state. Change - just for the sake of change - is not a good thing.

43) It seems the town would still have to have poll workers to check on registration, place the ballots in the box, etc., so this isn't much of a savings. The whole process seems cumbersome to me.

44) No Comment

45) I do not believe this would be cost effective for larger municipalities.

46) We have "Vote by Mail." It is called Absentee Voting. Since anyone can request an absentee ballot for no apparent reason, I feel this entity is already in place.

47) No Comment

## ATTACHMENT D

Question 9: If Municipalities were Given a  
Choice, Would you Implement  
“Vote by Mail” in your municipality?



**Question 9: If municipalities were given the choice, would you implement "Vote by Mail" in your municipality?**

**Yes Comments:**

- 1) We have a difficult time staffing the polls. This would help as we may not need as many or any poll workers depending how the change is made. It may appear as a more private fashion for voters to cast their vote as they can do so in the privacy of their homes.
- 2) I would, but I don't know if my council would be in favor of it unless it was cost effective.
- 3) Probably
- 4) No comment
- 5) No comment
- 6) Don't know - too many questions. If it would need council approval, I don't know how they would vote. We would need to compare the costs of mail elections to costs of elections as we know them. We would need to know procedures to determine how they would work for us. If not implemented, absentee process needs to be streamlined.
- 7) "Vote By Mail" would be less costly to run than the current process and would avoid replacing equipment to meet ADA requirements.
- 8) More participation
- 9) Hopefully would increase voter turnout
- 10) Only if we could pick the elections that we would want to do it at.
- 11) No Comment
- 12) It would help with the problem of finding election clerks and allow residents to vote that might not take the time to come in to vote.
- 13) BECASUE WE DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO GET MORE PEOPLE TO VOTE, THIS WOULD HELP.
- 14) We already process a large volume of permanent absentee ballots and during the presidential the amount tripled. It is more efficient to do one or the other, not both.
- 15) We don't have a great number of locations in our community that can handle large voter turnouts. Voting by mail would enable voting to be more convenient for people.

**No Comments:**

- 1) To me, that is what absentee voting is for.
- 2) Too many loopholes
- 3) Too expensive and open to fraud. How could you actually know who completed the ballot--compare each signature against registration? We don't have the resources for that!
- 4) It would not be cost efficient for us and very time consuming for the clerk.
- 5) I think this is more work. People who really want to vote will either vote in person or absentee.
- 6) Not unless the cost savings were overwhelming and the citizens were asked via non binding referendum.
- 7) The privacy of the voting booth would be lost.
- 8) It would greatly add to my work load. It would cost much more. Contrary to what is said in your email, it is the voters responsibility to get out to vote.
- 9) No Comment
- 10) UNSURE
- 11) See answer to #8. I don't think it would be cost effective for a possible increased turnout.
- 12) I'm afraid that voters would not get the ballots back on time.
- 13) No comment
- 14) I THOUGHT THE PURPOSE BEHIND HAVA WAS TO ELIMINATE VOTER FRAUD-  
---TELL ME: HOW CAN WE TELL THIS IF VOTES ARE SENT OUT BY MAIL?
- 15) Confusing to electors