

## **Wisconsin Freight Advisory Committee (FAC) Meeting 20**

Meeting Minutes from Wednesday, October 15, 2025

9:30 a.m. to 3:40 p.m., Held in-person in Madison, Wisconsin

**FAC Member Organization Representatives:** Peter Andrews, Kurt Baumann, Shawn Brantmeier, Maria Cartier, Tim Fiocchi, Kari Heinrich, Chris Hiebert, Matthey Hovar, Grace Howe, Debby Jackson, Dan Johnson, Peter Kammer, Larry Krueger, Ken Lucht, Kristi Luzar, Nick Novak, Ernie Perry, Richard Pingel, Dean Prestegaard, Henry Schienebeck, Sandi Siegel, Carl Suhr, Linda Swann, Aileen Switzer, Jake Thomas, Evan Umpir, Don Vruwink, Mike Wenholz.

Additional FAC Member Organization Proxies Present: Kim Conradt, Anupam Srivastava

**Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Members Present:** Deputy Secretary Scott Lawry, Angela Adams, Stephanie Arduini, Brad Basten, Lt. Bill Berger, Ehren Bittorf, Joe Coughlin, John Etzler, Mike Finkenbinder, Joel Gonzalez-Santiago, David Hubbard, Erika Kluetmeier, Dave Leucinger, Merrill Mechler-Hickson, Todd Merchant, Jennifer Murray, Claire Paprocki, Hillary Pelton, Scott Schoenmann, Kyle Schultz, Justin Shell, Sarah Simonson, Kamden Stark, Lisa Stern, Matt Sudac, Sydney Turner, Matt Umhoefer, Chuck Wade, Cassandra Walbrun.

**Guests Present:** Mark Abrahamson, Eric Imlay, Libby Ogard, Robert Swan.

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### **Welcome (9:30 a.m.)**

*Chuck Wade, Division of Transportation Investment Management (DTIM)*

Mr. Wade welcomed attendees and reviewed the agenda and contents of the meeting folders.

### **Opening Remarks (9:35 a.m.)**

*Scott Lawry, WisDOT Deputy Secretary*

Deputy Secretary Lawry noted the importance of the FAC to development of the department budget for transportation improvements, which included increases to the State Highway Rehabilitation (SHR) and Majors programs. He noted that the current budget included a \$580 million transfer from the general fund; it's unclear where that funding will come from in the next budget. However, Deputy Secretary Lawry noted the progress on construction on the I-39/90/94 corridor – a major freight corridor – and the start of construction on the I-94 East-West segment in Milwaukee County. He noted that other sessions would talk about the state budget and thanked the FAC members for offering valuable feedback.

### **FAC Membership Update and Recap of the 19<sup>th</sup> FAC Meeting (9:40 a.m.)**

*Angela Adams, DTIM Deputy Administrator*

Ms. Adams noted that reappointments of past members have been completed, and she welcomed back those members that are returning. She also noted that four new member organizations – and members – have received appointments. Those are Schreiber Foods (Peter Andrews), Milwaukee Logistics Council (Kurt Baumann), Walgreen's (Shawn Eckenrode), and Menominee Tribal Enterprises (Jennifer Peters).

She also welcomed new representatives for returning organizations. Those included the Wisconsin Counties Association (Collin Driscoll), the Wisconsin Agri-Business Association (Grace Howe), the Wisconsin Economic Development Association (Melissa Hunt), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Breann Popkin), the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (Evan Miller), the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals, Twin Cities Roundtable (Jack Thomas), and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (Aaron Zitzelberger).

Ms. Adams then briefly recapped the April 2025 FAC meeting, which included Voices of Industry that discussed the “under 20’ structures” program that is now moving forward, and a preview of the Milwaukee Air Cargo terminal now nearing completion. There was also an update on the Agricultural Roads Improvement Program – which was funded again for the new biennium, as well as a review of the updated Intermodal Report. Then, the FAC members were given a refreshed summary of the 73 current State Freight Plan policies. WisDOT is required to have a new State Freight Plan by mid-2027. The next few FAC meetings will discuss whether more policies are needed or need to be revised, and how flexible they can be made. Finally, FAC members and WisDOT staff were given a tour of Walgreen’s distribution center in Windsor. On average, each day sees 85,000 cases brought in and 73,000 cases sent out.

For a full summary of the 19th meeting, please reference the Meeting 19 minutes on the FAC web page.

#### **ARIP – Wisconsin Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP) – Update (9:55 a.m.)**

*Merrill Mechler-Hickson, WisDOT*

*Hillary Pelton, WisDOT*

In a follow-up presentation from FAC Meeting 19, Merrill Mechler-Hickson updated members on the Agricultural Roads Improvement Program (ARIP), now funded again under a new program cycle. Mr. Mechler-Hickson first offered an overview. In the 2023 budget, \$150 million was appropriated for what was originally thought to be a one-time effort. In the 2025 budget, the program received \$120 million for this cycle. Eligibility remains consistent; projects are eligible for up to 90 percent state share. Roads must be local roads or minor collectors that provide access to agricultural lands or agriculture processing facilities and be designated as Class B or have posted weight limitations at least one month per year. The road must be administered by a political subdivision, and once the project is completed load restrictions must be removed.

In the previous budget, 91 projects received awards that totaled almost \$150 million through ARIP. Examples shared by Mr. Mechler-Hickson include the first paved road in the Town of Kelly (Bayfield County), a \$2.35 million project that supported both agriculture and forestry and saved more than 200 reduced load trips during spring weight limits. A second example cited was a 2.6-mile road in the Town of Sugar Camp (Oneida County) that supports logging, cranberries, and potatoes; the \$1.2 million project eased transportation of 43 tons of crops each year (not counting timber).

Mr. Mechler-Hickson said the first funding of ARIP saw almost 300 applications for \$500 million in project costs. WisDOT expects strong demand will continue for this cycle of funding. Of the 91 projects funded in the first biennium of the program, 715 producers were identified as benefitting – with sales of \$12 billion and 15 million tons of product. Sectors receiving benefits included grain crops, fruit and vegetable production, animal products, dairy, forestry, and other (including ethanol and animal feed).

For the most recent (2025-27) biennium, \$50 million was made available in the first round, with solicitations open October 6 through December 15. After review and prioritization, awards are expected to be announced in April of 2026. A second round of funding in 2026-27 will have \$70 million available.

One new addition to local road funding is the Local Culvert Improvement Program (LCIP). This program provides \$30 million (in addition to the \$120 million noted previously) to address needs for structures less than 20' in length. It is a one-time authorization for this biennium and follows the efforts of the Transportation Development Association and the Wisconsin Towns Association on conducting an inventory and condition assessment of existing structures. The process for project solicitation and applications are expected to be made available in early 2026. WisDOT is examining the legislation for guidance on how to administer the program. Any remaining program balance will be rolled back into ARIP.

A question from an FAC member asked about a proposal from one state senator to eliminate the posting removal requirement from ARIP. Mr. Mechler-Hickson responded that proposal is under discussion, given the uncertainties of how it will impact the program. The impact will depend on the language in whatever legislation gets passed. Mr. Mechler-Hickson also shared before-and-after photos from several completed ARIP projects.

#### **State Freight Plan Panel 1: Safety, Security, & Resiliency (10:10 a.m.)**

*Sara Husen, WisDOT (Moderator)*

*Mark Abrahamson, Acrisure*

*Kim Conratt, Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association*

*Eric Imlay, Schneider*

In the first of three panels to discuss State Freight Plan (SFP) policies, Sara Husen began the panel by discussing the WisDOT Resilience Improvement Plan. The IIJA established the policy as “PROTECT” – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-saving Transportation. The PROTECT Grant program is focused on addressing surface transportation system resilience to current and future extreme weather events and natural disasters. Within the realm of natural hazards, WisDOT is focusing on the meteorological threats – floods, hail, strong winds, winter storms, wildfires, and similar potentially damaging events. The main benefits of this strategic effort are improving the reliability of the transportation system, incorporating resilience into planning and programming, and reduced cost-shares for projects eligible under competitive grants.

The Wisconsin Resilience Improvement Plan (WRIP) incorporates other statewide plans, including the Transportation Asset Management Plan, the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the State Freight Plan. WisDOT also worked with Wisconsin Emergency Management on the Threats and Hazards Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA), which evaluates the risk of threats by combining probability, vulnerability, and mitigation potential to develop a ranking.

Next, Eric Imlay from Schneider talked about the safety and security perspectives and tools his company uses. The company's equipment logs 9.4 million miles per day; there are 11,500 trucks in its fleet. Its key sectors include dry van, intermodal, and liquid bulk shipments. The company recognizes its safest drivers with a “Haul of Fame” for those that have achieved 10 years or one million miles safely; currently, more than 430 drivers have made that threshold. Schneider is the only company to receive all three National Safety Council Green Cross Awards.

For Schneider, Mr. Imlay said it starts with hiring the right drivers – and then training them on the corporate culture. It can take anywhere from five days to eight weeks to on-board new associates. Once hired, there is also ongoing training. Schneider also invests in technology to improve its shared use of the roads, including tools for fatigue management for drivers and physical technologies on the truck like collision warning systems, communication systems for route optimization, and improved lighting. There were many other truck features that Mr. Imlay displayed in a graphic, including LED lighting, mirror eye side cameras, lane departure warning systems, comprehensive telematics that log vehicle operation and communications, inward- and outward-facing cameras, safer under-ride guards on trailers, and more.

Schneider has also trained employees to be aware of potential human trafficking; it is mandatory for new drivers to complete training on how to identify and report suspected activity. To date, 175,000 drivers have completed this training, Mr. Imlay said.

Finally, Mr. Imlay highlighted Schneider's strategies and practices to improve protection of freight while in transit. He noted there are several methods used by thieves to receive goods, including fraud, robbery, paperwork alteration, falsifying records, and other means (including electronic cloning). Basic security includes trailer padlocks and placing locks on trailer kingpins to prevent unauthorized pickups. It also includes making sure drivers have secure spaces to park.

Next, Mark Abramson introduced himself. Currently with Acrisure, he spent 27 years with Wisconsin State Patrol. Working in multiple roles has given him a unique perspective on freight safety and infrastructure. He stated his goal is to work with clients to help them use technology to better navigate federal regulations.

Also introducing herself was Kim Conratt, who directs safety programs at the Wisconsin Motor Carrier Association (WMCA). One program she manages in support of improving safety for drivers and their companies is the Wisconsin Road Team; its designated Captains travel to high schools to promote how to share the road with motor carriers. They also push a message to stop texting. The alarming things they have found from 500 high school visits include 50 percent of students don't wear safety belts; yet, 60 percent of crash deaths could have been avoided if belts were worn. In Wisconsin there have been six commercial vehicle crashes with deaths in the past year. One was a tow driver killed; the other five victims would have been alive had they been belted. Ms. Conratt also presides over Safe Driver Club Awards; some drivers have achieved 30 years of safe driving.

Ms. Husen then began a set of moderated questions, first asking each panelist for their top three safety concerns. Mr. Imlay responded by noting safety must be a core value, as it is at Schneider – that includes protecting their associates and other drivers. It also encompasses driver health; Schneider has funded a sleep apnea program that includes testing. Another key issue is English language proficiency. Some states issue non-domicile (non-state resident) CDLs (Commercial Driver Licenses). There have been some news stories of drivers with these licenses causing fatal crashes. The third would be the rising claims against insurers when crashes happen. Litigation has led to several "nuclear verdicts" (multi-million-dollar judgments); the industry is working to combat those judgments.

Ms. Conratt said the WMCA holds seminars to teach trucking company safety directors how to improve safety. Driver health is critical. So is truck parking; there may be no safe place to pull over other than exit ramps – and when a driver is told to shut down, they don't have options. One other safety area that needs more work – 48 percent of female drivers report that they have been assaulted; four percent report being raped. The need for well-lit lots is essential. Women currently comprise about eight

percent of truck drivers.

Mr. Abramson noted his experience with crash reconstructions and working to quickly reopen and rapidly mitigate crash scene backups. The priority should be to utilize best practices around crashes, including improved driver awareness to provide the public with information to avoid incident locations. He suggested improvements to the dynamic messaging systems could help, as could crash detection tools that would spot where roads have closed or slowed down. In decades past, Citizens Band (CB) communication provided that notification – the question is what can replace that now. One crash in Georgia from stopped vehicles being hit resulted in eight deaths and charges filed against the driver. Mr. Abramson also raised bridge hits as a concern, noting the closure of a major Interstate Highway in Philadelphia when a tanker truck caught fire, and the heat weakened steel support beams of the bridge. Ultimately, the best practice is to be proactive and try to prevent these crashes.

He noted that when crashes occur between passenger vehicles and trucks, 90 percent of the time it is the fault of the passenger vehicle driver. Mr. Abramson said that cameras have helped to save the trucking industry from lawsuits in these cases and also help monitor drivers. Crashes mean insurance losses, and insurance companies won't sell to companies with bad records – or they will raise the premiums to very high levels. Trucking company safety in the industry is measured by the Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) score from FMCSA. It is based on metrics in seven areas, and ranges from zero to 100. Higher scores indicate poorer safety compliance and higher risks for insurance. Those scores are also noted by plaintiffs and their attorneys.

Another area of insurance concern is cargo theft. Mr. Abramson said the industry cost is \$38 billion per year, with an average cost of \$200,000 per incident. It is important shippers and receivers conduct truck inspections and check bills of lading to confirm who has authority to receive the goods. There has been increased fraud with bills of lading; automated systems help establish licensing and authorized persons. Cyber logistics is emerging as a theft concern, as criminals track trucks and steal credentials. If a company has trailer tracking, they can see the loads going elsewhere. These thefts are usually highest in the fourth quarter as holiday merchandise is moved.

Good companies work to protect their CSA scores since it is a comparison measurement with peer companies. Keeping accurate records is important, as the biggest predictor of trouble is driver behavior. Acrisure works to mitigate the poorer drivers with training programs and management systems with the goal of corrective actions. Companies also apply technology like speed governors; tech (like systems that keep a 6.5 second gap with vehicles in front) also helps retrain drivers who may have come from poor driving schools.

Ms. Conradt raised the issue of non-domiciled drivers and enforcement of English proficiency. Some states (not Wisconsin) are known for issuing non-domiciled licenses. Drivers who can't read English attempt to use bridges with low weight limits and are generally a safety concern. She also noted WMCA efforts towards ensuring safe and secure parking and her work with the Women in Trucking organization. She noted one Interstate Highway corridor (not in Wisconsin) has some areas that are not safe. On cargo theft, she said a vulnerable time is when drivers are having their mandated rest – cargo is unloaded while they sleep in their cabs. She said more monitoring is needed with remote cameras and centralized monitoring.

She also noted that when ELDs have drivers enforced to tight timelines, it can be harder to work around those to get to a safer location. She emphasized how critical it is for shippers and receivers to get drivers

in and out efficiently and allow them sufficient time to find safe parking. There should be alerts to drivers for lengthy and unexpected on-duty detention time, and drivers should be given the opportunity to drive to the nearest safe place once they leave the shipper / receiver. That carve-out for HOS would be safer for drivers, Ms. Conradt said.

Mr. Abramson went into greater depth on the FMCSA's CSA rating system. This program to measure carriers goes back to the 1980s; originally, it was not public – it targeted the worst carriers for heightened inspections. The 2010 iteration of the CSA developed a point system that credited a company for positive actions and debited them for negative actions. Some of the metrics tracked include actual crashes, HOS compliance, compliance with the Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse, hazmat operations, and driver fitness. These metrics are measured and updated monthly. The information is publicly viewable; the management system displays violations. Companies can see their own data in greater depth. By checking social media and the number of violations, companies that are proactive should show up favorably.

One FAC member asked Mr. Imlay if Schneider used forward-facing cameras, lidar, and / or radar? He replied that yes, all Schneider trucks have forward-facing cameras and Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS). Another FAC member asked what the next steps will be on English proficiency. Ms. Conradt said it was a big discussion point at a conference she had just attended. Unified action is needed across all the states to ensure drivers can read and write in English. She said there needs to be a written test, and that the non-domiciled driver licenses need to be ended. Several companies use foreign drivers and issues have been witnessed in states on both the East and West Coasts. In Oregon, 60 drivers were found to not have been proficient in English; there was just rudimentary testing.

Mr. Abramson added that English language proficiency has always been required. He wished FMCSA would release a test that would ask drivers about roadside signs they should know and be able to read and understand. For enforcement, the fix should be to send drivers through training and have that training documented.

#### **State Freight Plan Panel 1: Safety, Security, & Resiliency – SWOT Tabletop Discussions (10:55 a.m.)**

After a brief explanation of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, tabletop discussions were held. This information has been collected in a separate document.

#### **State Freight Plan Panel 2: Harmonization & Collaboration (11:30 a.m.)**

*Ehren Bittorf, WisDOT (Moderator)*

*Debby Jackson, Transportation Development Association*

*Ernie Perry, UW-Madison / Mid-America Freight Coalition*

*Robbie Swan, G&G Specialized Carriers*

*Mike Wenzholz, Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Commission*

For the second panel, Mr. Bittorf began with an overview of existing freight collaboration efforts that WisDOT participates in. Foremost is the MAASTO Highway Transportation Committee, where WisDOT works with neighboring state DOTs on efforts to bring more uniformity across the region. Other efforts include the FAC, Carrier & Permit Services, the Mid-America Freight Coalition (MAFC), coordination with WisDOT regional freight operations, and the State Patrol. WisDOT has upgraded its permitting system to where it now harmonizes with other states on the layout of the permit for easier reading. There have also been regional agreements for alignment on OSOW permits during future emergencies. WisDOT has

also been holding regular meetings of its regional freight operations staff to help inform them of resources and to improve consistency and standards across the five WisDOT regions. WisDOT has also improved its forms, guidance, and software to be consistent with other states. This has helped the permit unit go from 50% automated (in 2018) / self-issued permits to 85% (by 2023).

WisDOT has also emphasized policies of advanced protection. These include mandated corridor reviews whenever construction brings road changes, policies to continue to expand truck parking, collaborating with surrounding states when issues cross border (such as the Blatnik Bridge in Duluth-Superior or the Black Hawk bridge with Iowa), and improvements to routing details and instructions.

Next, Ernie Perry presented a brief overview of MAFC. The coalition was formed in 2008 through a 10-state memorandum-of-understanding that pools funds from each of the 10 Midwestern / MAASTO states to conduct freight research, publish reports, hold an annual meeting, and promote professional development through networking. Wisconsin manages the fund for the 10 states. The MAFC also encourages interactions with other multi-state freight transportation coalitions.

Some of the MAFC research reports cited by Dr. Perry include Emergency Divisible Load Management, which noted the limits of OSOW loads off Interstate Highways; the Truck Parking Information Management System; and Construction Impacts, which discussed how to manage construction from a regional rather than a local perspective. Other topics in research included truck platooning, which would require legislative changes; and regional harmonization – discussing shared rules, data, and model integration opportunities for consistency and collaboration across ten states.

Presenting perspectives from specialized (OSOW) carriers was Robbie Swan of G&G Specialized Carriers. Their company operates across all North America and has issues unique to their sector. First, where is it permissible to park? For loads that are tall and wide, there are almost no places on state highways. OSOW carriers also must be aware of different axle weight rules from state to state. He said the sector is fortunate that Wisconsin has good infrastructure and laws that generally harmonize with surrounding states. He stated each state needed to get harmonized on issues such as axle spacing and bridge weight limits. Mr. Swan noted positive working relationships with the State Patrol on getting heavy loads through the state but said construction on primary routes brought regular issues of impediments.

Mr. Swan said that his sector is most affected by routes assigned to OSOW but not confirmed as capable. There are headaches created when drivers get to bridges that can't handle heavy loads. The OSOW operators see needs system-wide. The state, municipalities, and counties need to communicate together on acceptable routes. He noted that some trucking companies also have tried to "go with easy permitting services" and they get into problems.

He displayed photos of some of his special loads to demonstrate their challenges. One example was a winch for a nuclear power plant that was 17' high that needed to be transported from Waukesha to Marinette, and then by water to its destination. He noted the move took 10 days. Mr. Swan said Wisconsin allows OSOW loads up to 16' high and 14' wide to move without escort vehicles. However, once the larger loads hit the state line, an escort is needed to cross the border. Other loads his industry moves include power generation units for data centers and power plants and military craft. One great challenge his industry faces is when a transformer blows at 2 AM at an electric substation – and a replacement needs to be moved immediately. Companies need to know what routes can be used, no matter the jurisdiction.

Finally, Mike Wenholz of the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Commission (MIC) talked about how their MPO handles cross-border planning, including their truck route study. The MIC is one of 11 MPOs in Wisconsin and one of eight in Minnesota. The goal of MPOs is for a high level of harmonization across communities in a metropolitan area. Planning encompasses states, counties, cities, and towns – the objective is to plan for all. The MIC is unusual in that it is bi-state, encompassing 641 square miles. The five key elements of regional planning that make for successful outcomes are planning efforts that are: continuing, cooperative, comprehensive, performance-based, and multimodal.

Specific to trucking, the MIC produces a Long-Range Transportation Plan (with a 25-year window) and produced a Truck Route Study in 2018. It has also developed a Port Land Use Plan that includes trucking operations such as the large loads of wind turbine parts (including blades that are 240' long). The MIC has also been helping prepare for the closure and replacement of the Blatnik Bridge. One study looks at how other roads will respond to changes in traffic, since the region will be down to one bridge (the Bong) for five years. Superior will be more impacted from traffic diversions. Some of the partner agencies for the MIC on trucking issues are the Duluth-Superior Transportation Association, the UW-Superior Transportation & Logistics Management Program, and MIC's Harbor Technical Advisory Committee. The HTAC is important because they bring all the players together – federal and state agencies, all the freight modes, the environmental offices, and port security. It's interesting to note that water drones are now in use because of underwater security risks.

Debby Jackson of TDA noted her organization covers all modes, focused on making investments that improve safe and efficient movement. TDA has been successfully working with the Towns Association and the legislature to address culverts across the state. TDA was also part of the coalition that supported the Majors program to expand I-39/90 in Rock and Dane Counties. She emphasized bringing people together; when asked for specific recommendations she said it was important to look for common ground. Start with an open mind and a goal to collaborate; share the work and share the credit when success happens. Communicate early and often; this is critical to help overcome setbacks when they happen. For example, the efforts for the culvert / "Under 20" program required working with multiple groups to get inspections done – including county highway commissioners and consultants.

Dr. Perry added that the MAASTO Committees – such as Highway Transportation – are a good example of working collaborations. Mr. Wenholz said that the freight groups have been closely involved with the Blatnik project. Five years of construction has raised a lot of fear – how will freight work without the Blatnik? MnDOT and WisDOT are trying to help as best they can. In Duluth, the West Superior St. corridor will be critical, and the MIC has worked with trucking companies on designs to allow OSOW loads to navigate the corridor. Mr. Bittorf noted that there has been a lot of collaboration with local businesses in Duluth and Superior.

Mr. Bittorf then asked for recommendations on how to navigate challenges in working with multiple agencies. Mr. Swan said they start at the state level and work their way down to counties and then cities. He said that local governments were the hardest group from which to get OSOW permits. He suggested that there may not be enough awareness of OSOW operations at that level of government, and some additional education could be helpful. He said to be successful requires persistence, and the state should make more of an effort to communicate with local governments on why a load needs to get routed a certain way. Mr. Wenholz said that another challenge is that on long-term projects, there is employee turnover and loss of institutional knowledge. There are also challenges with regulations that don't mesh across political boundaries, such as load limits. Mr. Bittorf added that WisDOT has good cross-border communications with Minnesota and Iowa; those communications are a little hit-and-miss



elsewhere. He also emphasized that when there are changes in routes, everyone needs to know who else needs to be informed.

A question was raised on collaboration between the public and private sectors. Dr. Perry replied that networking and collaboration efforts should have some fun involved. Ms. Jackson said that both sectors often face the same problems – that there are too many things going on, and that there’s always turnover. The difference is that taxpayers have legislative oversight and the open records laws. The public sector usually has less ability to make changes quickly, but this has improved from the past. Any large organization – public or private – will be slow to change.

## **State Freight Plan Panel 2: Harmonization & Collaboration – SWOT Tabletop Discussions (12:15 p.m.)**

This information has been collected in a separate document.

### **Voices of Wisconsin’s Freight-Related Industries (1:25 p.m.)**

*Larry Krueger, Lake States Lumber Association*

After the FAC reconvened following lunch, Mr. Krueger refreshed the group by noting 46 percent of the state is woodland. The sector employs 63,000 people and has a \$24 billion impact on the state’s economy. He said tariffs have created turmoil; in one example, three containers that were destined for China were refused once the elevated tariffs were applied to the loads. Between return costs for shipping and demurrage charges for the excess days the containers were in use by his company, it cost five times the original shipping cost to recover the contents – thousands of dollars in expenses.

Mr. Krueger said red oak is one of the nation’s top export items, but that tariffs have turned customers to other sources and that it will be hard to get that business back. The consequences will be long-term. There is still a demand for these materials in China; they have been by far the biggest importer of Wisconsin hardwood products. He compared his sector to that of ginseng producers and said they got more relief than the hardwood growers in the U.S. He said that up to half of the timber mills are going bankrupt and closing. Sales will still happen, but they will be at lower volumes.

Mr. Krueger reiterated the need for more efficient freight services to Wisconsin’s exports, stating that Wisconsin has the highest export shipping costs of any state. He said he has had meetings with Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) and Canadian National; both companies are interested in finding solutions to make shipping less costly. For the first mile, the ARIP program is helping get more product shipped with fewer loads, lowering those transportation costs. He noted new staffs at some Class I railroads have helped overcome challenges with past issues, and at the local level they are looking to bring business back to Wisconsin. However, there may still be older mindsets at the top corporate offices. Mr. Krueger said most of the old stations that were operational on the old Wisconsin Central Limited are no longer in place, so logs have to be moved by truck to Western Wisconsin to be treated for use as railroad ties. Both Collins and Hilbert – former log loading locations – have closed and so have many sawmills.

*Dean Prestegaard, Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA)*

Mr. Prestegaard noted that in coming from the side of economics that many economic development folks don’t take transportation into account when recruiting businesses. However, he sees hope for improved understanding of the importance of transportation. The new CEO of WEDA, Melissa Hunt, comes from a background in planning and was at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). She’ll be expected to bring a broader understanding of what’s needed to support industry and to offer new perspectives. Missy Hughes has resigned from her leadership role at WEDC; a new leader

will be coming.

Mr. Prestegaard noted activities of WEDA include advocacy, such as promoting legislation that supports industry. One example is business tax credits for workforce support, such as housing and child care for employees. There is potential that WEDA may offer support in the future on transportation issues. He noted that Ms. Hunt will represent WEDA starting in the spring 2026 FAC meeting.

*Sandi Siegel, ME Dey & Company*

Updating the current conditions for trade, Ms. Siegel said there has been a lot of conversation on tariffs and their impact on trade. The first quarter of 2025 was the best quarter for her business as companies front-loaded their imports ahead of the anticipated tariffs. Then In April the tariffs were announced, then delayed in implementation as an interim 10 percent rate was established for most trade during the second quarter. As of the meeting, Ms. Siegel said there haven't been major consumer impacts yet, since the big tariff numbers were just entering the import stream. She said she expects that trade will begin flattening out in the third quarter and remain lower through the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2026. She noted ocean rates had actually declined; for the first time in her experience there was no price spike for the peak season of imports (May – September).

For exports, volumes are down; soybeans were particularly hit – historically, 80 percent of the U.S. crop went to China; as of the fall FAC meeting there had been no sales. Prices had also fallen from \$12 per bushel to \$8 per bushel. She said this was creating issues for the survival of family farms and the mental health of farmers. Even though there have been some carve-outs announced, she hasn't seen any positive outcomes. She added that costs of imports haven't been seen by the consumer yet. Lastly, she reaffirmed her support for intermodal freight and advocates for it to help shipper and receivers be more competitive in their respective markets.

*Lt. Bill Berger, Wisconsin State Patrol*

Lt. Berger began his update by addressing English language proficiency testing at the SWEFs. He emphasized there is a thorough process in place to test drivers. The first part of the test has 15 questions with different verbiage; if the driver does not correctly answer these questions, it is a violation. In the second part, if the driver passes the first round of questions, they are given a test on road signs and asked to explain what each sign means. If they fail this round, it is also a violation.

Lt. Berger said that since June 2025, State Patrol has issued 78 violations for English Language Proficiency; that amounts to half of one percent of all tests. When asked for what will put a driver out of service, he replied that a violation automatically puts the driver out of service, and the carrier needs to furnish a new driver – that's mandatory. However, if the driver is issued a citation, it becomes a discretionary judgment of the trooper, who can assess the degrees of non-compliance.

Lt. Berger then noted that Wisconsin will be participating in a national trucking industry study on crash causation for commercial motor vehicles. The data will be included if both the State Patrol was the investigating and reporting agency, and that there was a fatality connected from a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) crash. This study won't include fatalities reported through county sheriffs. A third party hired by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will be tasked with conducting outreach to the driver and/or the driver's company to learn the details of what happened and how it happened. The goal is to get honest answers that can allow for a deeper dive into causation of CMV fatal crashes. This is the only way to help get to root causes of crashes and work to reduce or eliminate them.

WisDOT has its new facilities at Hudson and Menomonie now operating with intelligent over-height and over-weight detection. There are also plate readers that can then allow access to insurance records, safety scores, and registration. There are placard readers for hazmat and infrared cameras to detect brake issues, along with a tire anomaly system that can detect issues while vehicles are moving at highway speeds. Combined, these systems help State Patrol to keep the good trucks moving while pulling out the poorer ones for scrutiny. He also noted another update on the bypass system. Previously, companies and drivers needed to subscribe to a paid service to communicate the data that would allow for bypass. Now, the upgraded systems allow carriers to bypass without a vendor subscription. This puts Wisconsin far ahead of other states in use of technology.

When asked how drivers would receive bypass signals without these communication systems, Lt. Berger replied that as the drivers approach a facility along the main highway corridor, detection is made by overhead arms and sensors in the pavement. This is around a mile ahead of the SWEF. Then the driver passes two message boards that work together – they'll either say the driver is OK to bypass, or that the driver needs to exit to the scale. If the driver is in the left lane – or keeps going – then there's tracking and an alert comes up in the SWEF that will dispatch an inspector to catch the trucker. Lt. Berger said he's been very impressed with the tire anomaly detection system.

### **State Freight Plan Panel 3: Operations, Mobility, & Efficiency (1:45 p.m.)**

*Scott Schoenmann, WisDOT (Moderator)*

*Dick Pingel, Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA)*

*Carl Suhr, Kwik Trip / Convenience Transportation*

*Kassandra Walbrun, WisDOT*

For the final panel session of the day, Scott Schoenmann began with a brief overview of the Bureau of State Highway Programs (BSHP). This bureau is responsible for 12,000 miles of state highways and has four large programs it administers. The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) is structured for quick and smaller-scale fixes. The State Highway Rehabilitation (SHR) program is for large-scale maintenance projects along corridors, such as repaving. The Majors and the South-East Freeway Mega Programs address major system reconstructions, including capacity expansions. BSHP collects a lot of data related to the system including pavement condition (measured by a distress index) for state and national highways. This is done via vans that are equipped with sensitive equipment that measures pavement roughness and captures video of the condition for visual confirmation. BSHP also collects traffic counts at 27,000 locations in the state; most are measured on a 3-year comparison (some are 6-year). BSHP also works with the State Patrol to collect and review crash and safety data and also assesses roadway conditions. BSHP coordinates with the WisDOT regional staff on maintenance cycles that address safety and operational concerns.

The metrics used to determine performance are established in the department's performance improvement program. The Backbone System is the most critical component of the State Highway System. It accounts for 13 percent (1,590 miles) of the total system but carries 49 percent of all traffic and 85 percent of all freight tonnage. The established standard is that at least 90 percent of this system is in fair condition or better. For the past several years, this standard has been exceeded, with 97 to 99 percent of this system in fair or better condition.

Freight mobility is another metric of importance, Mr. Schoenmann said. Bottleneck measurements are federally required as performance measures, and also within the State Freight Plan. The intent is to identify where the issues are and to seek remedies to minimize them. The tools used are travel time

reliability – the consistency of being able to travel between points over the same amount of time – along with bottleneck counts, congestion duration, and overall truck volumes. These measurements were first made in 2016 and updated in 2020 and 2022. The next update will be in October of 2026, which will inform the 2027 release of the State Freight Plan.

Mr. Schoenmann noted that as Majors projects have addressed bottlenecks, they have also had safety benefits. The largest projects have included I-94 North/South from the Illinois State Line to Milwaukee; the Zoo Interchange; I-41 from Neenah to Green Bay; I-43 from Milwaukee north into Ozaukee County, and I-39/90 from the Illinois State Line to Madison. The Transportation Projects Commission meets every two years to make recommendations for any potential new Majors; the next meeting was scheduled for the end of 2025 and, as of the FAC meeting, WisDOT was considering recommendations for one or two additions.

Next, Dick Pingel of OOIDA offered the perspectives of his organization. OOIDA has 150,000 members; 90 percent of trucking companies have five or fewer trucks. The major concerns for his organization are hours-of-service; OOIDA is seeking more flexibility to find safe parking. The complaint is that once the ELDs say time is up, truckers are compelled to pull to the side of the road rather than find a safe place. He also noted the English Language Proficiency requirements but observed that others had covered the issue earlier in the meeting. The other issue that's emerged over the past six months is non-domicile issuance of commercial drivers' licenses. OOIDA has worked on this issue for decades. Finally, he said broker transparency is a growing concern as some unscrupulous brokers contract out loads they've accepted without having proper authorization, or without the intent of paying the trucker performing the service. OOIDA is seeking improved transparency and compliance improvements that allow truckers to see who is paying for what in the transaction.

Next, Carl Suhr of Kwik Trip (and its Transportation arm, Convenience Transportation) offered the perspectives of a dedicated carrier with extensive experience along Wisconsin highways. Kwik Trip currently has 900 stores and serves them with its own fleet that covers more than 21 million road miles across Wisconsin – almost 62 percent of total mileage in the company fleet. Stores and trucks operate 24/7/365 and are refrigerated to deliver goods to stores. Fuel deliveries are similarly handled. The company's business model is one of vertical integration, making most of its own perishable products – from bakery to the blow molds for the plastic milk jugs. The company does rely on a number of outside carriers to bring other products (such as bananas and chicken) to the La Crosse distribution center. Kwik Trip receives 30,000 shipments per year; 20 percent are intrastate (from elsewhere in Wisconsin) and most of these are handled by Wisconsin-based carriers.

Convenience Transportation's fleet is focused on these last-mile deliveries; the company doesn't outsource much for refrigerated shipments. Around 160 loads per day are sent out from La Crosse. The company does use some interline shuttles of trailers, Mr. Suhr said. For fuel, the past year saw 305,000 loads shipped; nearly 20 percent of these were hauled by outside carriers.

Mr. Suhr said that company had reached the limits of its La Crosse operation and made the decision to build a new distribution center in De Forest, just north of Madison. This will help address current inefficiencies for distribution, reducing the total number of miles traveled. Once at full operation, De Forest will serve 300 to 350 (about a third) of Kwik Trip's stores. The company expects a quick return on investment, given the reduced miles traveled.

Finally, Cassandra Walbrun offered the FAC an overview of WisDOT's Truck Parking Study, which was a

few months underway as of the FAC meeting. The goals of the study include documenting the need for safety and compliance with HOS regulations by identifying where the needs are the greatest so that those locations could be considered for improvements. The preliminary results are expected by spring 2026 with the final report expected in the summer of 2026.

Ms. Walbrun said that demand clearly exceeds available parking in some areas, but that truckers generally avoid the SWEFs. The study's safety focus will be data-driven, will inform asset management, and will help ready the department for any potential competitive grants for truck parking. The study will also provide a baseline for demand that can be used for comparisons in the future. Further, it satisfies one of the federal requirements for State Freight Plans.

WisDOT has been successful with two recent competitive grants for truck parking, Ms. Walbrun said. Along I-90 near Sparta, WisDOT received \$8 million, which has added 54 spots. Along I-43 near Maribel, WisDOT received \$12 million in grant assistance for a project that is underway which will add 72 spots.

In closing, Ms. Walbrun gave highlights on WisDOT's truck parking study. The consultant has finished the literature review and is now conducting an inventory of public and private truck parking. By December, a stakeholder survey was expected to be underway to capture perspectives of drivers, trucking companies, and truck stop owners. A demand evaluation is also being developed for the current year and 2035. From these inputs, recommendations for prioritized investments can be developed and used to compete for funding. The Study Team crosses Bureaus – Planning & Economic Development, State Highway Programs, and Highway Maintenance. Ms. Walbrun was asked if the study would identify both legal and illegal parking spots. She replied that anything that isn't a legal parking spot isn't a spot; WisDOT knows they are used but they're not legal.

Next, Mr. Schoenmann asked a series of questions to the panel. First, he asked how have advancements in technology affected operations. Mr. Pingel said that it should be noted that what works for one doesn't work for everyone. For owner-operators, there isn't a return on investment from many of the systems used by large companies. The way he said he ensures safety is by realizing if he crashes, he's out of business. The best investment is a well-trained driver. By contrast, Mr. Suhr said there are a number of technologies they have – from disc brakes on equipment, to Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) that use cameras and sensors. There are also driver training programs, dynamic routing, and single billing. He said that when the ADAS get out of alignment, drivers need to know when to report it for repair. Ms. Walbrun said that at WisDOT, there has been an evolution over the past decade. One example is the cross-walking of data – pulling safety data from several sources to allow a focus on the locations of greatest concern. Technology is evolving and developing faster than the agency can keep up, but it allows for improved decision-making. Engineers can focus on the data and GIS for designing facilities, including sufficient parking capacity. Mr. Pingel added that his sector is most scared by mandates; owner-operators don't want to be test subjects. Mr. Schoenmann observed that the quality of data is critical as data drives investment – data such as traffic counts. There are smarter devices being developed to improve accuracy.

Next, Mr. Schoenmann asked panelists about their top operational challenges. Mr. Suhr said cell phone use is their greatest concern with drivers. On highways, he said STH 21 needs more passing lanes. Their drivers have faced numerous high-risk situations from passing attempts. He also said that load restriction signs are not always clear, and that trucks can find they're on a restricted road before they know it. Wisconsin is better than other states in signage, but that's still an area of concern. Mr. Pingel said truck parking is the biggest problem – and that drivers don't use SWEFs because they don't want to

cross the scales when they exit.

Mr. Schoenmann then asked which systems have the greatest needs. Mr. Pingel offered STH 73, STH 21, perhaps STH 64, and the Madison Beltline and I-90 up to US 151 and Windsor. There are several secondary non-state roads that need work – for example, near Cambria there is a cheese factory with a wooden local bridge – and that’s the only road in and out. In a final question to the group about potential efficiencies from intermodal freight, Mr. Suhr said all their transportation is truckload. Bananas might be a possible commodity, but that shipping decision is way downstream from how they arrive. The Kwik Trip business model is immediacy, and trucks are required for that. Mr. Pingel added that we do need more rail service. More truck drivers want regular schedules without long drives.

### **State Freight Plan Part 3: Operations, Mobility, & Efficiency – Tabletop Discussions (2:35 p.m.)**

This information has been collected in a separate document.

### **WisDOT 2025-27 Budget Overview (3:15 p.m.)**

*Emily Lindsey, WisDOT*

Ms. Lindsey’s presentation summarized the 195-page 2025-27 State Biennial Budget for transportation. In total, Act 15 provided \$8.96 billion to WisDOT for the two-year period. A portion (\$55.6 million) of that is reallocated to other agencies, leaving \$8.90 billion in effective spending power. The sources of the funding includes state funds (\$5.48 billion; 61 percent), federal funds (\$2.32 billion; 26 percent), bonding (\$491.7 million; six percent), general purpose revenue (\$374.0 million; four percent), and other funds (\$292.0 million; three percent). The budget brings in additional revenue via higher title fees, higher registration fees, new specialty plates, bonds, and a general funds transfer.

On the expenditure side, state highways accounts for \$4.52 billion (51 percent), followed by local programs (\$2.82 billion, 32 percent), debt service (\$834.9 million, nine percent), and DOT operations (\$718.4 million, eight percent). Some of the areas seeing the largest increases are state highway rehabilitation (\$386.6 million / 17 percent more), Majors (\$199 million / 33.6 percent increase and enumeration of I-39/90/94 in Dane County), Southeast Mega Projects (\$62.5 million / 22.4 percent increase), and a new \$92.5 million design-build bond authority. Other increases included General Transportation Aids (up three percent), Paratransit Aid (up 10 percent), and another \$150 million for ARIP (with up to \$30 million of that set aside to target local bridges and culverts under 20 feet in poor or worse condition). The Local Road Improvement Program also received \$100 million in supplemental funding.

The Harbor Assistance Program fared well, with \$15 million in segregated funding for the program, another \$15 million in segregated funds for dredging the harbor at Menominee, and \$20 million for Brown County port development along the Fox River (to help facilitate relocation of a coal terminal). Also in the Fox Valley, \$30 million of Freight Rail Preservation Program (FRPP) funding is being directed to the South Bridge Connector project in De Pere. Other highlights include a \$30 million increase for general maintenance, \$6.58 million/year for DMV system modernization, \$6 million/year for driver education grants, and \$3.6 million for State Patrol body cameras. In addition, \$2.6 million is dedicated for in-squad camera data storage for State Patrol, \$9.5 million for DOT building projects, and \$1.5 million for facility maintenance. Questions were asked about the transfer of fund to other agencies, and whether the FRPP funding was typical or unusual. Ms. Lindsey replied that these projects were a challenge to fund because rail doesn’t fit into typical project costs. Further, rail lines are private. So future rail projects may need to

look at other options; one possibility would be to try and show savings from reduced road wear when freight rail service is provided. Most funding is based on budget papers, and the highway programs are usually making the submissions. There are defined program “buckets” and those limit what WisDOT is authorized to do with its funding.

### **Public Meetings & Open Records Training (3:30 p.m.)**

*Sarah Simonson, WisDOT*

In keeping with state requirements, Sarah Simonson presented a brief reminder on public meetings and open records. The FAC is a public meeting, and materials produced in development of the FAC are public records. Specific state statutes cover records management and public records availability. Virtually all items produced by WisDOT – typed or written documents, maps, charts, tables, etc. – are public records, and have specific rules for availability and retention. However, drafts, notes, and other related preliminary work prepared for personal use are not covered as public records. WisDOT is obligated to respond to public records requests as soon as is practicable, and without delay. The request may be written or verbal. Should an FAC member receive a request for public records, the member should forward it to the WisDOT freight team as soon as practicable. (Email: [Freight@dot.wi.gov](mailto:Freight@dot.wi.gov))

### **Closing Remarks (3:40 p.m.)**

*Matt Umhoefer, WisDOT*

In his closing remarks, Mr. Umhoefer thanked attendees for sharing their time and information with WisDOT, noting this meeting was the first modally focused meeting that will feed information into the State Freight Plan. The next meeting discussing Freight Plan elements was to be the Annual Rail Conference on November 4, 2025. In Spring 2026, the FAC meeting will examine maritime and air cargo policies and efforts. These meetings and the discussions from each will help set agency priorities.