

Freedom Matters

A News & Opinion Paper

Dane County, Wisconsin

Preserving Property Rights

Vol. 7, No. 4

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

Our republic limits government to securing individual unalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. These rights are eroded by legislatures, and by courts complicit with them. To encourage wise jurists and journalists to help, *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore that republic.

A Regional Transportation Authority: It's About an Unelected, Unrepresentative Taxing Body

by Bob Bowman

On Thursday night, August 16, 2007 (and going into the wee hours of August 17), supervisors aligned with the "Madison-Progressive" wing of the Dane County board, with their penchant for frivolous and anti-democratic actions, voted 20-3 for impeachment of President Bush and Vice-President Cheney. Just prior, they had voted 22-13 for a resolution even more mischievous: they had voted in favor of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

Why is an RTA more mischievous? It begins with the oddball politics of the Madison electorate. They elect politicians who aim for central command and control over the rights of people. Those politicians persist in trying to build an antique mass transit rail in Madison. That is so impractical (i.e., costly) that it seduces its supporters into misrepresenting it. Thus, it corrupts. For that alone, the voters should throw the rascals out.

Next, the publicized funding scheme for building Madison's rail is to get half the capital costs from federal taxes, half of the rest from state taxes, and the final 25% mostly from taxes on Dane County residents outside Madison. So, 90% of the cost of building it is to be paid for by people outside Madison, who would hardly ever use it.

For one of our richest cities to get poorer political units to pay for its toys is immoral. To redeem Madison, its voters must vigorously oppose that moral breakdown.

Finally, train transit fails big time to solve Madison's transit needs. Madison has far too low a population density for transit rail to work. The rail proponents have done everything to avoid revealing that fact. Their trickery in misrepresentation is a whole article in itself.

To illustrate, consider the dollar costs of the proposed transit rail. Studies were done via an appointed committee made up of rail sympathizers and called "Transport 2020" (T2020). By T2020's own data, the cost per passenger ride **for bus was under \$3**. For mass transit **rail it was over \$60** per ride. The \$60 figure was privately admitted, but not publicized, by T2020.

Thus, Madison rail is so costly that paying for taxi trips is cheaper. That's how foolish a Madison rail would be.

Furthermore, data indicates that T2020 egregiously underestimates the costs for both building and operating mass transit rail (see *Freedom Matters*, 2002, Issues #23, 24 and 25 at <www.freedommatters.org>).

Milwaukee studied building mass transit rail (cited in *Freedom Matters*, above). It realistically rejected it for the efficiency of bus systems, and is even dismantling its trolley line. Yet, Madison clings to its rail fantasy.

In sum, dollar costs are the best measure of efficiency in the use of resources. By that measure, the proponents of Madison rail are enemies of the environment.

The above shows that the Dane County board voted *not* for a transportation authority, but for a taxing authority. Madison's rich elite, to get a toy train in Madison (it is a toy for it fails to solve a need), must find a way to **pay** for it. The property tax is out, politically, so a regressive sales tax is the next most feasible source.

To get that tax, proponents are exploiting a congressional-style earmarks game. To get a new sales tax, they need a new state law. They already have a half-cent sales tax levied by the county to fund building the present jail. That jail has long been paid for, so the county could use its existing sales tax to pay for mass transit systems.

However, railophiles are greedier than that. They want the authority to levy an **additional** half-cent sales tax. For that, they need the support of more than Madison. So they play the earmarks game: they offer to split the new proceeds with all other units of government, in order to buy the votes of those other governments.

The worst of their trick is this. They hide the tax by pretending that it's for "regional transportation." You see, if regional transportation were all they wanted, the county already has the legal power to create an RTA, and to broaden it via intergovernmental agreements. They do not need a new state law to create it.

They need the new state law solely to give that new **unelected** government **the power to tax us**. Further, since Madison will get **far more** of that new tax than is paid in by Madison taxpayers, **it is really all about letting Madison tax the rest of the county**. The state must say no to letting Madison tax outside its borders. Citizens should immediately lobby the state legislature, lest this unneeded, unwise and unrepresentative taxing authority be snuck into the state budget bill.

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*** Published by Freedom Matters, Inc., Cross Plains, WI. 53528, Elena Byrne, Editor ***
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