



## Bridge Funding Update

Wednesday, January 26, 2005



### **Governor Doyle, Senator Roessler, and Representative Kaufert Secure Funding to Keep Fox River Bridges Operating.**

Governor Jim Doyle, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT), Senator Carol Roessler, and Representative Dean Kaufert have secured funding to keep lift bridges on the Fox River operating on a normal schedule for this year's boating season.

"We all know how important these lift bridges are, not only to boaters, but to the local economy along this outstanding recreational resource," Governor Doyle said. "We have reached the point where all parties can come to an agreement that will keep the Fox River lift bridges operating as they have in the past."

A tight budget had threatened to force the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to curtail operating a series of seven lift bridges in Menasha, Oshkosh, and Winneconne along the Fox River. However, meetings among local officials, Governor Doyle's office, Senator Roessler, Representative Kaufert, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation resulted in formulation of a plan that will provide the funding to keep the bridges open this year.

"I appreciate the Governor recognizing the importance of the lift bridges to the Fox Valley area," Representative Kaufert said. "By keeping these bridges open for the 2005 boating season, we will maintain our commitment to the boating community and more importantly, garner the economic benefits it provides to the area."

"Keeping the bridges operational is necessary to the local economies, boaters, tourists, and businesses," Senator Roessler said. "I'm pleased that our bipartisan efforts will retain this critical bridge and waterway accessibility."

DOT officials had anticipated a \$428,000 shortfall in the funding needed to keep the lift bridges, two in Menasha, four in Oshkosh, and one in Winneconne, operating on a normal schedule and had suggested curtailing the operating schedule to maintain its budget. Local concerns about the curtailed schedule led to public meetings and, later, negotiations involving Governor Doyle, DOT, Senator Roessler, and Representative Kaufert to develop a plan to keep the lift bridges operating.

The plans involve transferring funds from within DOT accounts to cover the operating costs. However, the transfer

requires approval of the Joint Finance Committee, which is co-chaired by Representative Kaufert. A meeting of the Joint Finance Committee is expected to be scheduled soon to address the proposed financing plan.

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In early January, Governor Doyle, Representative Kaufert, Senator Roessler, Department of Administration Secretary Marc Marotta, and DOT Secretary Frank Busalacchi sent a letter to the U.S. Coast Guard on a separate, but related, issue. The letter requested that the Coast Guard reverse its decision to stop regulating bridges over the Fox and Wolf Rivers. The request was made to ensure that area railroad lift bridges operate on the same schedule as the state lift bridges. The state has no authority to require the railroads to operate their lift bridges. Without the Coast Guard maintaining regulation, the railroads would be free to operate their lift bridges on whatever schedule they determined.

The Coast Guard will likely issue a response to this request shortly, but regardless of Coast Guard action, Governor Doyle, Representative Kaufert, and Senator Roessler remain dedicated to finding solutions that maintain the customary operating schedules and seasons for the state-owned lift bridges in Winnebago County. A short-term solution has been found for the 2005 season. Meanwhile, the Governor and legislators will continue to work together on a long-term solution.

