



**LEGISLATIVE
FISCAL BUREAU**

STATE OF WISCONSIN

JANUARY 2023

Informational Paper #41

Transportation Aid

General Transportation and Connecting Highway Aid

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(General Transportation and Connecting Highway Aid)

Prepared by

Ryan Horton

Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau
One East Main, Suite 301
Madison, WI 53703
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb>

Transportation Aid

(General Transportation and Connecting Highway Aid)

Local governments in Wisconsin have jurisdiction over the majority of the state's roads and streets. Since the early development of Wisconsin's road system, the state has provided financial assistance to local governments for their transportation-related costs, including the construction and maintenance of roads under their jurisdiction.

This paper explains the general transportation aid and connecting highway aid formulas and examines their distributional impact. An example of a general transportation aid calculation is included in the Appendix.

General Transportation Aid

General transportation aid (GTA) is paid to local governments (counties, cities, villages, and towns) to assist in the maintenance of local roads and the local costs of improvement and construction of those roads. This aid must be used for transportation-related expenditures. Aid payments are made from the state's segregated transportation

fund, which includes revenues from the motor fuel tax, vehicle registration fees, and other transportation-related taxes and fees. For 2022, general transportation aid payments equaled 24.0% of 2021-22 net transportation fund revenues after revenue bond debt service (including transfers from other funds).

General transportation aid is calculated and paid on a calendar-year basis, with quarterly payments on the first Monday of January, April, July, and October for municipalities. For counties, the transportation aid payment schedule is two installments, each equal to one-quarter of the calendar year total, on the first Monday of January and October, and a third installment equal to one-half of the calendar year total on the first Monday of July. Table 1 lists total general transportation aid payments for counties and municipalities from 2014 through 2023.

There are two basic formulas by which general transportation aid is distributed: (1) share of costs aid; and (2) mileage aid. Counties receive only share of costs aid, while municipalities and towns receive payments based on either share of costs aid

Table 1: General Transportation Aid Payments

Year	Municipal Aid	% Change	County Aid	% Change
2014	\$308,904,300		\$94,615,600	
2015	321,260,500	4.0%	98,400,200	4.0%
2016	321,260,500	0.0	98,400,200	0.0
2017	321,260,500	0.0	98,400,200	0.0
2018	348,639,300	8.5	111,093,800	12.9
2019	348,639,300	0.0	111,093,800	0.0
2020	383,503,200	10.0	122,203,200	10.0
2021	383,503,200	0.0	122,203,200	0.0
2022	391,173,300	2.0	124,647,300	2.0
2023	398,996,800	2.0	127,140,200	2.0

or mileage aid, whichever is greater. The Department of Transportation (DOT) is required, by October 1 of each year, to notify each county and municipal clerk of the estimated transportation aid payments to that county or municipality for the following calendar year.

Aid to Counties

Initial entitlements to counties are based on the share of costs formula. Share of costs aid amounts are computed by multiplying each county's six-year average highway-related costs (2016 through 2021 for 2023 payments) by a statewide average cost-sharing percentage. This percentage "floats" to a level that generates general transportation aid payments equal to a targeted distribution for counties (\$127,140,200 in 2023, and thereafter). For the 2023 distribution, the county cost-sharing percentage is estimated at 19.5%.

Aid to Municipalities

Each municipal government's initial entitlement equals the greater of its share of costs aid or mileage aid amounts.

Share of Costs Aid. The share of costs formula works the same for municipalities as for counties. The targeted general transportation aid distribution for municipalities is \$398,996,800 for 2023, and thereafter. For the 2023 distribution, the municipal cost-sharing percentage is estimated at 16.4%.

Mileage Aid. Mileage aid amounts are computed by multiplying the number of miles of road or street under the jurisdiction of each municipality by a specified mileage rate (\$2,734 per mile for 2023, and thereafter).

Mileage Reporting

For the purposes of determining transportation aid, local governments must submit to DOT either: (a) a certified highway mileage plat, if changes in

mileage have occurred within their jurisdiction since the last plat was submitted; or (b) a certified statement that no changes in jurisdictional mileage have occurred since the last plat was filed. DOT may require that a certified plat be submitted for odd-numbered years following a federal, decennial census. Jurisdictional mileage includes highway mileage under the jurisdiction of a local unit of government that will be open and used for travel on the following January 1. Any changes in jurisdictional highway mileage are first reflected in mileage aid determinations for the second year following the year of the submission of the plats indicating the changes.

Local governments, with the cooperation and assistance of DOT, must also conduct a biennial assessment of the physical condition of the highways within their jurisdiction and report the results to DOT. In making these assessments, local units of government are required to use a pavement rating system approved by DOT.

Cost Reporting

All local governments must report their highway-related expenditures for each calendar year. DOT has developed cost reporting guidelines to be used by local governments for cost reporting purposes. This information is submitted on financial report forms required by the Department of Revenue (DOR), which relays this information to DOT.

Eligible highway-related costs are divided into three major categories:

a. *Maintenance*; including costs associated with snow plowing and the maintenance of pavements, bridges, culverts, storm sewers, and traffic control devices.

b. *Construction*; including right-of-way acquisition, engineering, signing, and construction costs for pavements, bridges, culverts, and storm sewers.

c. *Other Highway-Related Costs*; including machinery and vehicle costs, building expenditures for road purposes, debt service payments, policing, and street lighting costs.

All public road, street, or alley construction and maintenance expenditures within the right-of-way are generally reportable as eligible cost items. The preceding list provides a general guide to the eligible costs definition. DOT's cost reporting guidelines provide more detail on eligible and ineligible costs.

Small municipalities (with populations under 2,500) must report highway-related costs for each calendar year by March 31 of the following year. Counties and large municipalities must report by May 1 of the following year. For municipalities and counties with populations over 25,000, an audited financial statement with supporting schedules must accompany the standard financial report and must be submitted by July 31 of the following year.

If a local government files a late report, its total aid for the following year is reduced by 1% for each working day that the report is late, to a maximum reduction of 10% (the resulting payment cannot be less than 90% of the previous year's payment). If the report is not received within 30 days of the filing date, the payment will equal 90% of the previous year's payment. A filing extension until May 15 is allowed, provided a request for an extension is submitted to the Department of Revenue (DOR) prior to the March 31 or May 1 deadlines. 2021 Wisconsin Act 102 provides that the penalty for a village or town that is less or equal to 30 days late in submitting their annual expenditure report is \$100 per late working day, up to a maximum of \$2,200.

For the 2023 aid distribution, 11 towns and three villages were assessed a total of \$24,400 in penalties on their payments for filing late. In addition, because Vernon County and Dodge County did not submit their required financial report to

DOR, their 2023 GTA payments were calculated based on 90% of their previous year's aid payment. As a result, Vernon County's payment was reduced \$186,500 and Dodge County's payment was reduced 335,800.

As a condition of receiving general transportation aid, each county and municipality must establish and administer a separate, segregated account from which moneys may only be used for purposes related to local highways. All moneys received from the state and the federal government for local highways must be deposited in this account.

Cost Cap on Mileage Aid

No municipality may receive an aid amount exceeding 85% of its three-year average (2019 through 2021, for 2023 payments) highway-related costs. Since aid payments under the share of costs aid formula make up a percentage of costs that is significantly lower than the 85% of three-year average cost maximum, this provision usually affects only municipalities receiving mileage aid payments. For 2023, it is estimated that 24 towns and three villages were subject to the 85% cost cap.

Low Equalized Value Towns. For a town with an equalized value in the previous year in the bottom quartile of equalized values of towns in the state for that year, 2021 Wisconsin Act 58 increased the current law 85% cost cap under the GTA formula to 98%, so that no such town in the bottom quartile may receive a GTA distribution greater than 98% of its 3-year average costs. Given that this adjustment to the cost cap occurs within the aid formula, any funds needed to cover up to 98% of cost for affected towns are drawn from municipalities on the share of cost component of the formula (primarily villages and cities). In 2023, 312 towns qualified under this provision as low-valued towns, of which 44 eligible towns received an estimated \$454,500 in total additional

aid needed to fund 98% of these towns' costs, rather than being limited to the 85% cost cap.

Limitation Adjustment Aid Payments. 2021 Act 58 provided \$1,000,000 annually from the transportation fund from a separate appropriation to make GTA adjustment payments to towns receiving mileage aid whose costs are affected by the timing of when reimbursement payments are reported as revenue. Under Act 58, if the amount of GTA paid to a town is subject to a cost cap, and DOT determines that the limitation was due to the timing of a reimbursement (typically a disaster damage aid payment or a local road improvement project payment) for an expenditure made by the town, the Department must make an additional aid payment from the appropriation in an amount that DOT determines compensates the town for the diminished payments. If any moneys appropriated are not sufficient to fully compensate towns qualifying for adjustment payments, the Department may prorate the payments among qualifying towns. For 2022, four towns received \$81,707 in limitation adjustment aid payments.

Maximum Growth Limitation on Share of Costs Aid

Both county and municipal share of costs aid initial entitlements are subject to a maximum growth provision. The initial share of costs aid entitlement is compared to a maximum payment level to determine whether an aid reduction is required. No local government is allowed to receive more than 115% of its prior year payment. The maximum growth provision prevents large, year-to-year payment increases. For the 2023 distribution, it is estimated that some aid will be withheld from 82 municipalities and three counties due to the application of the maximum growth provision.

Minimum Guarantee

The initial entitlements for all local governments receiving general transportation aid are

compared to minimum payment levels to determine whether additional aid is required. Both counties and municipalities are guaranteed only 90% of their prior year payment amount. For municipalities receiving mileage aid, their prior year payment is adjusted to reflect mileage changes prior to applying the minimum guarantee. The minimum guarantee provision prevents large, year-to-year payment decreases. For the 2023 distribution, it is estimated that aid will be increased under the minimum guarantee provision to 54 municipalities and one county (Florence) under the share of costs formula component and nine municipalities under the mileage aid formula component.

Distributional Impact

Over time, varying amounts of emphasis have been placed on mileage and costs in distributing general transportation aid payments. Since some local governments benefit more from mileage-based provisions while others benefit more from cost-based provisions, neither approach tends to satisfy both groups. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of general transportation aid expressed in terms of costs and mileage.

Statewide estimated transportation aid payments for 2023 equal 20.1% of reported costs for 2021. From this perspective, towns do the best, with payments equaling 36.8% of reported costs. Incorporated areas benefit the least, with payments ranging from 14.7% of reported costs for those with populations under 10,000 to 17.5% of reported costs for those with populations over 200,000.

This situation is reversed when aid payments are examined in terms of mileage. On average statewide, local governments received \$5,145 in 2023 payments for each mile of road under their jurisdiction. From this perspective, towns benefit the least, receiving \$2,796 per mile. Incorporated areas benefit the most, ranging from \$8,918 per mile for those with populations under 10,000 to

Table 2: Distribution of 2023 Total General Transportation Aid Payments

Jurisdiction	2023 Payments	2021 Reported Costs	Payments as a % of Costs	Jurisdictional Miles	Payments Per Mile
Counties	\$127,140,200	\$702,247,245	18.1%	19,819	\$6,415
Towns	171,401,488	465,890,832	36.8	61,295	2,796
Incorporated Areas					
Under 10,000	67,215,538	457,796,867	14.7	7,537	8,918
10,001 to 35,000	64,327,875	415,467,579	15.5	6,408	10,039
35,001 to 200,000	57,390,662	351,621,530	16.3	5,061	11,339
Over 200,000	<u>38,661,236</u>	<u>220,551,034</u>	17.5	<u>2,143</u>	<u>18,041</u>
Total	\$526,137,000	\$2,613,575,087	20.1%	102,263	\$5,145

Table 3: Distribution of Average Costs and Miles Used to Compute 2023 General Transportation Aids

Jurisdiction	<u>2016-21 Average Costs</u>		<u>Jurisdictional Miles</u>	
	Amount	Percent	Number	Percent
Counties	\$655,191,192	26.5%	19,819	19.4%
Towns	423,737,473	17.1	61,295	59.9
Incorporated Areas				
Under 10,000	412,957,780	16.7	7,537	7.4
10,001 to 35,000	397,899,368	16.1	6,408	6.3
35,001 to 200,000	349,032,737	14.1	5,061	4.9
Over 200,000	<u>236,046,472</u>	<u>9.5</u>	<u>2,143</u>	<u>2.1</u>
Total	\$2,474,865,022	100.0%	102,263	100.0%

\$18,041 per mile for those with populations over 200,000.

As this indicates, the relative success of each type of local government under the general transportation aid formula depends on the measure used to make the comparison. Governments that do poorly on the basis of payments received per mile (such as towns) have used this measure to argue for increased mileage-based payments. Conversely, governments that do poorly in terms of payments received as a percentage of costs (such as large incorporated areas) have argued that cost-based payments should be increased.

The current formula consists of both cost-based and mileage-based payments. The inclusion

of both types of payments reflects a recognition by the Legislature that neither type addresses the concerns of all local governments.

Table 3 provides information on the distribution of six-year average costs and local mileage, the two primary factors in the current formula. In total, incorporated areas have a larger share of the average highway-related costs (56.4%) than they do of the mileage (20.7%). Towns, on the other hand, have a majority of the mileage under the jurisdiction of local governments, but incur less than one-fifth of the highway-related costs. Finally, counties have over one-quarter of the average costs and about one-fifth of the mileage.

Connecting Highway Aid

Background

Connecting highways are certain portions of the state trunk highway system passing through municipalities. Generally, if a highway is altered to function as a local street, such as the construction of curb and gutters, the route is designated as a connecting highway by DOT and loses its designation as a state trunk highway. While the state is responsible for the maintenance of all rural state trunk highway mileage (this is done by counties under contract with the state), the maintenance of connecting highways is a municipal responsibility.

Under certain circumstances, the state retains maintenance responsibilities for a state trunk highway passing through a small municipality. As a general rule, this occurs whenever the geometrics of the highway are not significantly altered as a result of passing through the municipality.

Connecting Highway Aid Formula

Connecting highway aid payments received by an individual municipality are based on its population and the lane miles of connecting highway within its boundaries. The rates paid per mile are based on a statutory schedule (2023 rates are listed in Table 4), with aid on the first two lanes of any connecting highway being paid at 100% of the statutory rate, aid on the second two lanes at 75% of the statutory rate, and aid on any additional lanes at 50% of the statutory rate. In 2023, 116 cities and villages will receive \$12.1 million in connecting highway aid. Payments are made to municipalities in four equal installments, on the first

Monday of January, April, July, and October. If the appropriation is insufficient to fully fund the formula, payments are prorated. In 2023, payments were prorated at 88.5% of the formula amounts.

Table 4: 2023 Connecting Highway Aid Rates

Population	Aid Per Lane Mile
Over 500,000	\$11,724
150,001 to 500,000	10,860
35,001 to 150,000	9,678
10,000 to 35,000	8,525
Under 10,000	7,345

Lift Bridge Aid

The state also reimburses municipalities for the actual costs incurred in operating and maintaining swing or lift bridges on connecting highways. Eligible cities must submit documentation of their costs for the prior calendar year by January 31. Presently, four cities operate nine eligible lift bridges: Green Bay (Main Street), Manitowoc (8th and 10th Streets), Milwaukee (Broadway, Kinnickinnic, State, and Wells Streets), and Racine (Main and State Streets).

Lift bridge aid is paid on the first Monday in July for costs incurred during the previous calendar year. Consequently, the \$1,924,700 (the \$2,659,200 appropriation for 2022-23 less \$734,500 in unallocated funds) paid in lift bridge aid in July, 2022 (2022-23), was in reimbursement for actual costs incurred by the cities during calendar year 2021. If the biennial appropriation is insufficient to provide full reimbursement, payments will be prorated. Because funding available exceeded submitted costs in the most recent cycle, no proration was made in 2022-23.

APPENDIX

Computation of 2023 General Transportation Aid Payment for the Village of Paddock Lake (Kenosha County)

1. SHARE OF COSTS AID

Data Needed: Average of 2016 through 2021 Highway-Related Costs = \$623,504
Statewide Average Cost-Sharing Percentage = 0.163786

Computation:	Share of Costs Aid	=	Six-Year Average Highway-Related Costs	x	Cost-Sharing Percentage
		=	\$623,504	x	0.163786
		=	\$102,122		

2. MILEAGE AID

Data Needed: Jurisdictional Mileage = 17.22 miles
Mileage Rate = \$2,734 per mile

Computation:	Mileage Aid	=	Jurisdictional Mileage	x	Mileage Rate
		=	17.22	x	\$2,734
		=	\$47,079		

Since \$102,122 is greater than \$47,079, the Village of Paddock Lake receives aid through the share of costs aid provision.

3. MINIMUM GUARANTEE/MAXIMUM GROWTH LIMIT

Data Needed:		2022	2023
		Guarantee Base	Basic Entitlement
	Share of Costs Aid	\$106,698	\$102,122
	Mileage Aid	-0-	-0-
	Minimum Guarantee	-0-	
	Maximum Growth Limit	-0-	
	Cost-Based Aid Limit	-0-	
	NET TOTAL	\$106,698	\$102,122

Computation of Minimum Guarantee Minimum Guarantee = [.90 x 2022 Guarantee Base] - 2023 Basic Entitlement or \$-0-; whichever is greater
 = [.90 x \$106,698] - \$102,122 or \$-0-
 = \$96,028 - \$102,122 or \$-0-
 = -\$6,094 or \$-0-
 = \$-0-

Computation of Maximum Growth Limit Maximum Growth Limit = [1.15 x 2022 Guarantee Base] - 2023 Basic Entitlement or \$-0-; whichever is less
 = [1.15 x \$106,698] - \$102,122 or \$-0-
 = \$122,703 - \$102,122 or \$-0-
 = \$20,581 or \$-0-
 = \$-0-

4. COST-BASED AID LIMITATION

Data Needed: Average of 2019 through 2021 Highway-Related Costs = \$655,307
 Aid After Minimum Guarantee/Maximum Growth Limit = \$102,122

Computation of Cost-Based Aid Limitation

Cost-Based	
Aid Limitation	= [.85 x Three-Year Average Costs] - Aid After Minimum/Maximum or \$-0-; whichever is less
	= [.85 x \$655,307] - \$102,122 or \$-0-
	= \$557,011 - \$102,122 or \$-0-
	= \$454,889 or \$-0-
	= \$-0-

5. TOTAL 2023 GENERAL TRANSPORTATION AID PAYMENT FOR THE VILLAGE OF PADDOCK LAKE

Share of Costs Aid	\$102,122
Mileage Aid	-0-
Minimum Guarantee	-0-
Maximum Growth Limit	-0-
Cost-Based Aid Limitation	<u>-0-</u>
 Total	 \$102,122