



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #807

### Mississippi River Parkway Commission Position (Transportation -- Departmentwide)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 662, #7]

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#### CURRENT LAW

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission is responsible for coordinating the development and preservation of the statutorily-defined Great River Road in Wisconsin, spanning along the Mississippi River between Kieler (Grant County) in the south and Prescott (Pierce County) in the north. The Commission is comprised of designated civilian and public stakeholders, including two Senators and two Representatives, who serve without compensation. However, members can be reimbursed from the Department of Transportation's (DOT's) departmental management and operations SEG appropriation for expenses incurred in performing their duties under guidelines established by DOT. No DOT position authority is currently allocated for the Commission.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Great River Road is a designated collection of roads that follow the course of the Mississippi River through 10 states, and is the only designated national scenic byway in the state. Wisconsin's portion of the road is comprised of various state and local highways that run near the river and through several municipalities. Under current law, the Department is authorized to complete development projects on any portion of the road if the project is found, after investigations and studies, to be advantageous to the state. For the purposes of such development projects, the road would be considered a portion of the state trunk highway system, which could allow the improvement project to be fully-funded with state funds, rather than local funds.

2. Commission members include: (a) one member each from Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, La Crosse, Pepin, Pierce, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties; (b) two Senators and two Representatives

from the Assembly, split between the two major political parties; and (c) the Secretaries of Tourism, Natural Resources, and Transportation, and the Director of the State Historical Society, who serve as nonvoting members. While the members can be reimbursed for expenses incurred in performing their duties, all administrative work done for the commission is provided by the members without pay. DOT does not provide staff support to the Commission. The Department indicates that its expenditures to reimburse the Committee in recent years have been: (a) \$1,500 in 2020-21; (b) \$6,600 in 2021-22; and (c) \$5,600 from July, 2022, through February, 2023.

3. Assembly Bill 43/Senate Bill 70 would provide \$60,000 SEG in 2023-24 and \$80,000 SEG in 2024-25, and create 1.00 SEG position under the DOT departmental management and operations appropriation to hire an Administrative Director to support the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission. This would establish ongoing base funding of \$80,000 to continue funding the position beyond the 2023-25 biennium. The Department indicates that it has developed a work plan for the position, which would be responsible for coordinating services to the Commission and its committees, including meeting schedules, budgeting, clerical support, database administration, fiscal management, marketing and communications, and coordinating office operations. Provision of a dedicated position could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Commission's work to develop and preserve the Wisconsin Great River Road, and also reduce the current workload on the Commission's volunteer members. [Alternative 1]

4. While the Department indicates that it has developed a work plan for the position, a part-time position may be sufficient to perform many of these administrative tasks for the Commission. If the Department has concerns about the amount of revenues available from the transportation fund, or the need for a dedicated full-time position, it could instead allocate half of the requested funding (\$30,000 SEG in 2023-24 and \$40,000 SEG in 2024-25) and 0.5 SEG position authority to hire a part-time administrative staffer. [Alternative 2]

5. The Department did not include the position in its 2023-25 agency budget request and despite Department's work plan for the position, no specific workload justification for the position has been provided. Further, the Department could provide existing staff time and resources to assist the commission members. However, this could result in a continued need for some volunteer members to carry out the workload of the Committee. [Alternative 3]

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Provide \$60,000 SEG in 2023-24 and \$80,000 SEG in 2024-25, and create 1.00 SEG position to provide administrative support to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. Specify that the authorized positions for the Mississippi River Parkway Commission would be increased by 1.00 FTE, for the purpose of providing administrative support to the Commission.

ALT 1	Change to Base	
	Funding	Positions
SEG	\$140,000	1.00

2. Provide \$30,000 SEG in 2023-24 and \$40,000 SEG in 2024-25, and create 0.50 SEG position to provide administrative support to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. Specify that the authorized positions for the Mississippi River Parkway Commission would be increased by 0.50 FTE, for the purpose of providing administrative support to the Commission.

<b>ALT 2</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>	
	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Positions</b>
SEG	\$70,000	0.50

3. Take no action.

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