



Mason T. Becker  
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Fort Atkinson, WI 53538

To the Members of the Committee on Ways and Means,

I am writing to voice my opposition to AB 361 that would require municipalities to hold a public referendum if they wish to pass a vehicle registration fee (“wheel tax”).

To give you some background, I first ran for election to the Fort Atkinson city council in 2015. I was elected in April of that year. At that time, our city was dealing with some rapidly deteriorating roads, and had already started exploring possible options to remedy the situation. We considered all options available, including going to public referendum, further borrowing, etc.

I did reach out to our State Representative Cody Horlacher, and also was part of a meeting with our State Senator, Steve Nass. It became quickly apparent to me that while everyone recognized there was a problem with funding of road maintenance in our local communities (and our state as a whole), a solution for local funding would not be forthcoming from the state government. It was made clear that this was our problem to solve on our own.

Later in 2015, we passed a \$20.00 “wheel tax”. This allowed us to raise our street program funding from \$450,000/yr to \$675,000/yr (an increase of 50%). This money has made a huge difference in our street program. We have been able to resurface approximately 20 miles of streets in our community (which has about 65 miles total of streets to maintain) since passage of this user fee. Our roads are getting fixed, they look much better now, and our residents are taking notice!

The wheel tax is one of the very few tools left in a community’s tool box to fund street maintenance. With tax levies frozen at zero percent or net new construction, we had very few other options. As I am sure you all recognize, costs do not remain static over time. The costs of materials do rise, and they have done so over the past several years.

This bill represents a needless attack on local control. I am sure none of you appreciate it when the federal government places restrictions on the State of Wisconsin. We do not need further restrictions placed on our local municipalities.

I have already voiced opposition to this bill with Sen. Steve Nass. In a response to me dated July 20, 2017, Sen. Nass stated: "AB 361 still allows for the enactment and continuation of wheel taxes by local governments, but it reasonably grants the final decision to the people that will pay the tax."

While this sentiment certainly sounds nice, I would point out that the state government imposed new fees of \$100.00 on electric vehicles and \$75.00 on hybrid vehicles, during the last legislative session. The owners of such vehicle were not allowed to vote on whether or not they were willing to pay this new fee! So why single out local communities and counties that are trying to take personal responsibility to fund their critically needed infrastructure maintenance?

Further, the best control on government is in the form of elections. Since the unanimous passage of our "wheel tax", all four members of our city council who ran for re-election were easily returned to office by the voters. Apparently, our city's residents are fine with paying \$20.00/year for much better roads.

I hope you will take my thoughts into consideration. I regret that I am unable to attend your hearing on this bill in person. If the state government persists in passing this bill, I would hope it would at the very least be amended to "grandfather in" communities that have already passed a wheel tax (in some cases, quite a few years ago). Failure to do so would create an extreme amount of budget uncertainty for our city, and for many other communities throughout Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mason T. Becker".

Mason T. Becker  
Fort Atkinson City Council President