

The Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG) is an advocate for the public interest. When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interests, WISPIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. WISPIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

21st Century Transportation for Wisconsin

Wisconsin deserves a transportation system that meets 21st century needs, and that uses taxpayer dollars responsibly. Effective transportation policy creates attractive communities with high quality of life for all. By maximizing the benefits of new technologies, doubling down on proven strategies like public transit, investing in walking and biking infrastructure, encouraging smarter design of our cities and towns, and transitioning to electric vehicles, we can ensure that the transportation system we pass on to our children is clean, efficient, and accessible to all and makes the best use of taxpayer resources.

Prioritizing Multimodal Options to Help Our Communities Thrive

To put Wisconsin on track towards a 21st century transportation system that addresses current and future needs, state leaders should:

- **Stop or downsize unnecessary or low-priority highway projects** to free up resources for pressing transportation priorities. This includes opposing the enumeration of new highway expansions in the 2019-21 biennial budget.
- **Increase public transit, walking and biking infrastructure funding by at least \$50 million per year** to help meet current and future needs. Expanding multimodal transportation options can reduce congestion, protect public health, and make our communities more vibrant by attracting young people who increasingly gravitate towards multimodal lifestyles.
- **Reinstate Transportation Alternatives (TA) funding for walking and biking infrastructure at a rate of \$10m per year.** A growing number of Wisconsinites, and particularly the younger residents of the state, want to live in communities where it is possible to walk and bike to destinations. Providing more opportunities for walkers and cyclists also results in fewer carbon emissions from automobiles, as well as a reduction in tailpipe emissions that are detrimental to human health and contribute to harmful smog.
- **Fund existing infrastructure including local road and bridge repairs.** Statewide, one in four local roads is rated as poor or worse. Because the state government has chosen to focus on highway expansion at the expense of all else, local roads and bridges have been allowed to fall into disrepair. Wisconsin can become a leader in new and efficient transportation infrastructure by funding crucially needed road and bridge repairs throughout the state.

Get the Lead Out of Drinking Water

All of our children deserve safe drinking water. Yet we have constructed systems that deliver water to their fountains and faucets laced with lead. And wherever there is lead, there is an ever-present risk of corrosion and contamination. Federal, state and local leaders must work together to get all lead parts out of water delivery systems. Schools and child care centers – where our kids learn and play every day – are the perfect place to focus prevention and remediation efforts. Lawmakers should:

- **Set a health-based standard that allows no more than 1 part per billion (ppb) of lead in water at schools and in childcare facilities**, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Medical experts agree that there is no safe level of lead, and standards that trigger mandatory remediation — often called an “action level” — should reflect this health assessment. Outlets where water exceeds this standard should be shut off until the source of lead contamination is removed.
- **Require and fund the installation of filters certified to remove lead** on all outlets used for drinking or cooking at schools.

Ensuring Personal Data Security and Control

Massive data breaches at Equifax and Marriott underscored how vulnerable our data is to hackers, and the Cambridge Analytica debacle demonstrated that the collection and use of our personal data online can easily be misused. We support policies that:

- **Strengthen protections under Wisconsin law to give consumers more control over their own data and keep it secure from identity thieves.** In particular, the legislature should tighten requirements for when consumers must be notified about data breaches, and expand the law to restrict improper data collection and use, to help prevent the next Cambridge Analytica.

- **Create protections to prevent the “Internet of Things” from invading consumer privacy.** The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated online work, and made us all more vulnerable. Strong laws give consumers assurance that as Internet-connected devices infiltrate our homes, audio and video recordings and other data about our intimate daily lives does not end up in the hands of hackers.

Stopping Consumer Rip-Offs and Predatory Financial Practices

Wisconsinites deserve fair rules of the road and an even playing field in the financial marketplace. WISPIRG stands up for policies that protect consumers from scammers, payday loan sharks, and other financial predators big and small that are looking to make a buck off the backs of ordinary Wisconsinites. Lawmakers should:

- **Oppose any efforts to exempt rent-to-own agreements from the Wisconsin Consumer Act** (e.g. 2017 SB637 / AB759 Moulton/Petryk), which would eliminate crucial consumer protections and transparency requirements while encouraging potentially predatory RTO companies to do business in Wisconsin. Rent-to-own transactions constitute high-interest loans marketed primarily to working- and middle-class families.
- **Support the creation of a 36 percent (or lower) interest rate cap to stop Wisconsinites from falling into predatory debt-trap loans.** Payday loans drive borrowers into financial distress by trapping them in long-term debt, at with average annual interest rates of nearly 500 percent in Wisconsin.
- **Give Wisconsinites the “Right to Repair.”** From cell phones to farm equipment, some companies intentionally make things harder to repair. We support reforms to give you what you need to fix your stuff.

Readying Wisconsin for Electric Vehicles

To clear our air, protect public health, and save consumers money, Wisconsin should accelerate the transition to an all-electric transportation system by supporting the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), and replace diesel and other fossil fuel-powered buses with clean, electric buses. WISPIRG urges policy-makers to:

- **Set ambitious goals for statewide EV adoption,** and work with state agencies and local governments to support the creation of public charging infrastructure.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The CARES Act has created some protections for consumers, but has also left many struggling. WISPIRG supports policies like:

- **Banning negative credit reporting for the duration of the pandemic.** Potential employers and landlords turn to credit reports; consumers should not be held responsible and lose opportunities because of circumstances outside their control.
- **Eviction moratoria.** The state of Wisconsin should educate consumers on their rights as tenants, and options available to those who could be facing evictions.
- **Banning debt collection for the duration of the pandemic.**

Protecting Consumers in Wisconsin and Nationwide

We believe consumers shouldn't have to worry about having their data stolen or privacy violated when they shop in a store or interact with companies online. Wisconsinites deserve fair rules of the road in the financial marketplace, whether they're looking to take out a consumer loan or buy a house. During the pandemic, Wisconsin needs more robust consumer protection laws so that as consumers emerge from this crisis, Wisconsinites can land on their feet.

Democracy for the People

Restrictive voting laws and the influence of wealthy special interests in the funding of elections have eroded public trust in our political system and helped to depress civic participation. We should do everything we can to ensure all eligible voters are able to have their voice heard on Election Day. Legislators should strengthen our democracy by supporting policies that:

- **Increase engagement in the democratic process through Automatic Voter Registration.** AVR would modernize the voter registration process and make our voter lists more accurate and secure.
- **Empower small donors and grassroots candidates.** By providing limited matching funds for small donations, we can create a more responsive campaign finance system that enables candidates to run for office without large or corporate campaign contributions.