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ROBERT J. BAUMAN

ALDERMAN, 4TH DISTRICT

Apparently money is no obstacle when it comes to building a new freeway in the South Shore suburbs

Statement of Alderman Robert J. Bauman February 28, 2012

In this era of budget cuts, budget deficits, furloughs, layoffs, benefit cuts, pay freezes, deteriorating local streets, deferred maintenance of critical infrastructure and a public transit system on life support, it appears that money is no obstacle in the minds of some Milwaukee County local officials when it comes to building new freeways.

It appears that a group of elected officials from the south shore suburbs want to extend the Lake Parkway six miles at cost of at least \$207 million to better serve Cudahy, South Milwaukee and Oak Creek. Never mind that I-94 is a mere five miles to the west of these communities and never mind that \$1.9 billion is being spent to reconstruct and expand this freeway from Milwaukee County to the Illinois state line; this new south shore freeway must be built because some motorists will end up saving several minutes of travel time.

It also appears that these officials assume that state and federal funds will be used to pay for this project. This money is presumably expected to come from the state and federal highway trust funds which derive their revenue from gasoline taxes, vehicle registration fees and other so called user fees paid by vehicle owners and operators. Both these funds are broke and have required subsidies from the state and federal general funds to maintain existing highway programs. Moreover, there is already a plan to spend approximately \$6 billion of state and federal funds to rebuild and expand the existing Milwaukee County freeway system. Apparently, these local officials see no limit to government's ability to spend tax money when it comes to freeway construction.

We are told that Cudahy, South Milwaukee and Oak Creek residents and businesses will benefit from this highway investment in terms of improved mobility, reduced travel times and economic development. In light of these benefits, perhaps these communities should pay for the highway project -- say an amount equal to 15% or 20% of the capital cost which generally corresponds to the amount the City of Milwaukee pays for highway projects funded by state/federal highway funds.

Perhaps if these three municipalities would have to come up with a local share of \$31 million to \$41 million, they might reach a somewhat different conclusion regarding the merits of more freeway building.