

For his part, Plale talked about the importance of approving the state Department of Transportation's plan for rebuilding I-94 from Milwaukee to the Illinois border. An expensive plan (and DOT should obviously look for every possible savings), it nevertheless is necessary for a healthy economy, as we have argued.

In response to a question, Plale stressed that the region also needs rail and adequate mass transit but that the I-94 rebuild is critical to southeastern Wisconsin.

He, too, is right.

Here's hoping the region has leaders up to the task of providing southeastern Wisconsin with the transportation network, regional agencies and funding needed to ensure a healthy economy.

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Editorial: Regionalize transit

If referendums are needed to create a regional transportation system and a funding mechanism to pay for it, then hold those referendums.

From the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Dec. 4, 2007

At a meeting last week of the Waukesha County Action Network, three regional leaders proposed action on matters involving water and transportation, two issues critical to the future of southeastern Wisconsin.

Yesterday, we suggested that area leaders and citizens take up state Sen. Neal Kedzie's challenge to have the Legislature move forward on legislation to approve the Great Lakes compact. Today, we urge the same leaders and citizens to follow up on challenges posed by Phil Evenson and state Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee).

Evenson, executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, stressed the importance of addressing transportation needs on a regional basis and of making sure that different pieces of a regional system, such as the proposed commuter rail line linking Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee, get built.

He also stressed the importance of paying for such a system on a regional basis, such as a regional sales tax, as many other municipal areas around the country are doing.

"I'm told that we need a referendum to do that," Evenson told regional leaders at the Waukesha County Action Network meeting last week. "Then I say get on with it. Hold the referendums. Let's get moving."

He's right. The Legislature failed to fund KRM in the state budget. That shortsighted failure means others need to take up the challenge. But, based on their track record, government officials aren't likely to step up. Which means, as Evenson told us Tuesday, that it's up to the business community to start pushing for referendums and to get behind a sales tax that can pay off big in economic development.

The Milwaukee 7 regional partnership group is making regional transportation a top issue. That's good news for southeastern Wisconsin. We hope the group can convince government and business of the importance of a regional transit system and regional financial support for all transit.