

DATE: March 5, 2018

TO: Michael Mayo, Sr., Chair, Transportation, Public Works and Transit Committee

FROM: Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: **Regarding File No. 18-255 relative to regional transit and workforce development to connect Milwaukee, Racine, and the future Foxconn manufacturing campus**

There is good reason to be optimistic that Foxconn will be the catalyst for better coordination between transit systems and closing the service gaps in southeastern Wisconsin. The debate is well underway: ideas such as a Regional Transit Authority and commuter rail have resurfaced, while newer ideas for "flexible route" options, such as vans and ride-hailing, are also in the mix, along with discussion of "fixed route" options such as bus lines.

We can make real progress on connecting workers to jobs by launching a new bus route that links Milwaukee and Racine to the soon-to-be-built Foxconn complex in Mt. Pleasant, and we should start now. At my request, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission recently completed a preliminary analysis of the concept and the results showed tremendous opportunity. Initiating a bus route to Foxconn is viable without any new taxes and could potentially jumpstart a new era of cooperation on what has historically been a divisive issue - regional transportation.

Despite a general consensus that a regional approach to transit would boost local economies, efforts to integrate transportation systems in southeastern Wisconsin have been mired in gridlock for decades. Better coordination between existing local transit systems and finding innovative ways to fill gaps in service has common sense appeal, but agreement on a path forward has been elusive.

The scale and pace of the Foxconn project means that failure to find a solution to the "jobs gap" problem - the challenge of connecting workers to jobs, especially those without their own vehicle - is no longer an option. With the massive project expected to employ up to 1,000 workers by the end of the year, and possibly 13,000 within five years, we simply can't wait any longer to modernize our regional transportation network.

Fortunately, state and local leaders are acutely aware of the need to adjust how governments work together to align with the unique nature of the Foxconn project. Planning is moving swiftly to bridge a jobs gap that is suddenly much wider than before, and to recruit and train future employees.

If history is any guide, however, funding challenges or an unwillingness to cooperate could delay timely action. In an effort to implement a workable solution as soon as possible, I've proposed that Milwaukee County, Racine County, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) jointly agree to a new bus route from Milwaukee and Racine to Foxconn using newly available resources.

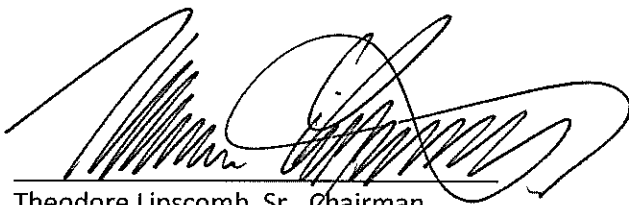


Milwaukee County, Racine County, and the WEDC's precursor, the state Department of Commerce, came together previously to support a different regional employer, when they agreed in 2003 to jointly support Midwest Airlines. Milwaukee County recently completed the sale of Midwest assets used as collateral to secure that financial backing, leaving a little more than \$4.5 million available to us after paying off all creditors and expenses.

With this proposal, I invite Racine and the WEDC to partner with Milwaukee and create a new bus route serving Foxconn, which could be expanded upon in the future. While we could divvy up the \$4.5 million, so that each party's share would go into our own general funds, that would mean foregoing the opportunity of working together and capitalizing on massive investment in the region.

A dedicated bus line that connects hundreds of workers in Milwaukee and Racine to jobs at Foxconn would be a major step forward to address the jobs gap problem. If we succeed, our effort could inspire greater intergovernmental collaboration and innovation as we look for more ways to help workers access available jobs and confront southeastern Wisconsin's transportation challenges.

Authored by:



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Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors