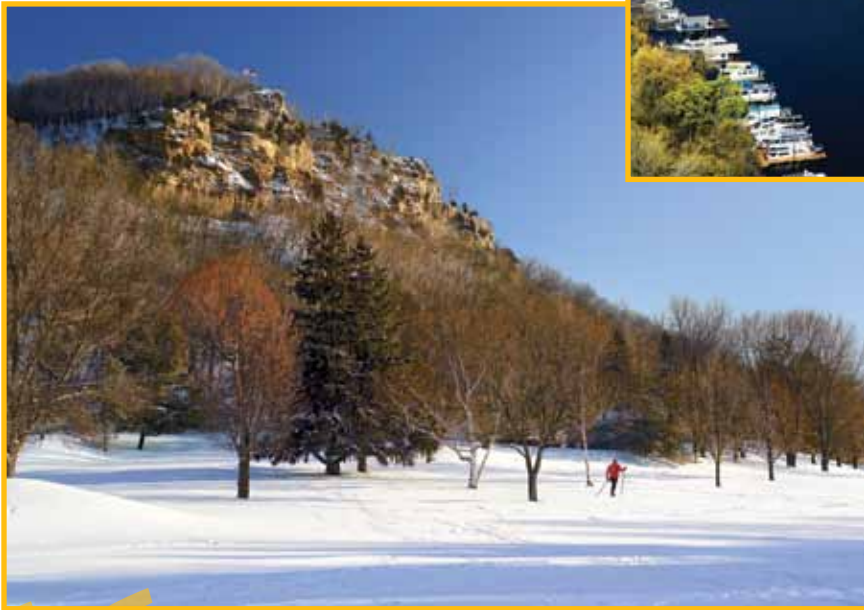




# Oktoberfest in the Capitol

La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce  
La Crosse Area Convention & Visitors Bureau  
La Crosse Area Development Corporation

712 Main Street • La Crosse, WI 54601 • (608)784-4880



La Crosse named to list of  
**Best Places  
to Live 2009**  
- US News & World Report



## *Thank you!*

*The citizens, business and community leaders of the Greater La Crosse Area wish to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated public servants of Wisconsin government.*

*Your hard work and commitment do not go unnoticed. You have our sincere appreciation for the jobs you do in the legislature, executive and judiciary branches and in every agency of state government.*

*Wisconsin has long been the home of good and progressive government. We are proud of that tradition. We are proud of the work you do for the people of this great state.*

# *The La Crosse Area Front & Center*

**E**very two years, approximately 100 delegates from the La Crosse Area participate in Oktoberfest in the Capitol, traveling to Madison to share issues of particular importance to our area with our state legislators and agencies of state government. 2009 marks 20 years and the 11th edition of Oktoberfest in the Capitol. The La Crosse Area has seen tremendous support and action on many of the issues that have been brought forward as part of Oktoberfest in the Capitol. For this we offer our sincere “Thank You”!

## **The key issues we bring forward this year include:**

- ▶ Focus on adopting the existing “Empire Builder” route as the designated route for High Speed Rail and articulating a timeline for completion of the segment from Madison to La Crosse as an economic development catalyst.
- ▶ A request to provide the La Crosse Area, and communities throughout Wisconsin, the ability to create Regional Transit Authorities in the same manner granted to particular communities in the 2009 – 2011 biennial budget.
- ▶ Focus on the importance of Wisconsin’s tourism promotion budget as an integral element of healthy communities and economic development.

## **Additional items of interest to the La Crosse Area include:**

### *Myrick Hixon EcoPark*

We thank the Legislature for including an allocation of \$500,000 for the Myrick Hixon EcoPark in the recently completed 2009 – 2011 biennial budget! The dollars will help propel forward the completion of the zoo project, consisting of indigenous animals in their natural environment. The zoo project, coupled with the recently completed environmentally sound nature center and the many other improvements to the Myrick Hixon EcoPark will increase the quality of life in the La Crosse Area focused around our natural environment and will also serve as a catalyst for tourism and economic development.



## *Funding for Higher Education*

Two of Wisconsin's finest institutions of public higher education are found in La Crosse, the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse and Western Technical College. These higher education institutions, along with Viterbo University and the new campus of Globe University, are an integral part of the community, economy, culture, and indeed, the very future of Western Wisconsin.

UW-La Crosse broke ground this summer on its new Centennial Hall on the site of two former residence halls. Construction of the new building will provide 44 new classrooms and lecture halls incorporating advanced technology and is designed with the needs of students in mind. The \$44 million Centennial Hall project, made possible by a combination of public and private dollars, is the first new academic building on the UW-La Crosse Campus since 1974.

Construction of the new Veterans Memorial Field Sports Complex was completed in the spring of 2009, thanks to the efforts of the UW-La Crosse Foundation in raising over \$16 million in exclusively private dollars needed to fund this project. UW-La Crosse also looks forward to construction of a new residence hall on campus necessary to replace the rooms lost to the construction of Centennial Hall.

Western Technical College's new \$5 million Lunda Center was recently completed. The Lunda Center - Community & Corporate Training Center will provide expanded customized training opportunities with state-of-the-art technology. Additionally, a new 9,000-square-foot Welcome Center was recently added on Western's La Crosse Campus. It houses all student intake services, providing a more efficient, effective and "essential" service to students. Construction of a new residence hall is also underway, providing a tremendous benefit to students rarely found on technical college campuses.



*UW-La Crosse Veterans Memorial Stadium  
(Photo courtesy of Flo Aliesch, University Relations)*



## *Industrial Park Development & Promotion*

Thank you to the Wisconsin Legislature for your work to amend Wisconsin State Statute 66.0305 concerning intergovernmental cooperation, to include counties in the definition of “municipality”. We brought this issue to you as part of the 2003 and 2005 editions of Oktoberfest in the Capitol after we witnessed an interesting example of intergovernmental cooperation gone awry in 2003. An innovative approach to finance the infrastructure development for the Lakeview Business Park in West Salem was created by industrial park backers. The new tax revenues flowing into the County of La Crosse and Village of West Salem from the new development would be combined for an agreed upon period of time to finance a loan for initial infrastructure improvements. This would have been the first revenue sharing agreement in the La Crosse Area and leaders of both the County and Village

were committed to this agreement. However, statute at that time would not allow this process to go forward because the statute only allowed revenue sharing between “any two or more municipalities” and counties were not considered municipalities. Since this amendment, revenue sharing has been instrumental to the continued growth of the Lakeview Business Park where today there has been over \$11 million in investment and over 150 new jobs have been created.

*Lunda Center – Community & Corporate Training Center*



*UW-La Crosse Centennial Hall  
Artist Rendering*



# High Speed Passenger Rail Rolls Forward

## Position Statement

Transportation infrastructure plays an integral role in maintaining and strengthening Wisconsin's economic vitality and the La Crosse Area has been a crossroads, a place to meet, a place of important commerce in the Upper Midwest for centuries. Wisconsin and the La Crosse Area in particular boast some of the best transportation infrastructure in the country with Interstate 90, the Mississippi River, the La Crosse Municipal Airport, and freight and passenger rail service. These and many other amenities make the La Crosse Area an ideal location for business.

**However, increasing access to the major regional metro-markets via High Speed Passenger Rail Service along the existing "Empire Builder" route (Chicago/Milwaukee to Minneapolis/St. Paul via La Crosse) will greatly advantage Western Wisconsin and offer High Speed Passenger Rail the greatest chance of operational success at the lowest upfront cost.**

## Background

### History

In the mid- 1990s, The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative Board authorized a study of the viability of High Speed Rail throughout the eight state region and authored the recommendation that the core component of the rail corridor was the existing "Empire Builder" route from Chicago/ Milwaukee to Minneapolis/St. Paul via La Crosse. A key to the success of High Speed Rail, defined as trains traveling up to 110 miles per hour, is the **frequency** of daily service throughout this corridor thus allowing riders to reliably reach major regional metro-markets and return in a single day.

Further definition was given to High Speed Rail in the Wisconsin DOT's State Freight-Passenger Rail Plan 2020. In it, in-state alternative routes were examined and the **Western Route, with six trains per day, was confirmed to be the most cost effective with the greatest chance for operational success.**

## Current Status

### Federal:

President Obama announced earlier this year that \$8 billion have been identified in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and \$1 billion a year for five years has been requested in the federal budget for the implementation of High Speed Passenger Rail. The Chicago Hub Network which includes the route between Chicago and the Twin Cities via La Crosse is included among the 10 corridors up for potential high-speed rail funding.

We applaud the progress and scheduling that has moved the route improvement issues along from Chicago to Milwaukee to date, and are even more encouraged to hear of the focus on the "Milwaukee to Madison" segment in the next few years.

### Wisconsin:

Wisconsin's recently approved 2009 – 2011 Biennial Budget contained two provisions that will severely slow the State's progress in moving forward on this important initiative. The budget provision that calls for environmental and fiscal assessment of the alternative High Speed Rail routes running through Wisconsin,



and the corresponding provision in the DOT's Connections 2030 long range transportation plan, will significantly slow the pace at which Wisconsin can achieve appropriate funding for phase two from Madison to the Minnesota border. Furthermore, delaying the articulation of the final route and a schedule of work will delay the ability of our friends in Minnesota to move forward with their necessary planning.

Another provision in the State Budget allows for the creation of Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in a handful of metro areas without approval via a referendum. Allowing "RTA islands" is poor public policy, especially when granted via the budget process and even more so when a statewide authorization of RTA's had been given thorough debate earlier in the Joint Finance Committee. All communities with high speed rail service at stake should have the same ability to bring funds to the table which could include RTA funding sources as an additional alternative.

### **Wisconsin's Role**

We in the La Crosse Area ask that the appropriate state and federal officials articulate **a plan to complete the "Madison to La Crosse" segment in the most practical and understandable terms: with a planned-for schedule of work, a budget of monies and the commitment that is needed for major undertakings like this.** It should become a matter of expectation, not wonderment or debate, as to when the "Madison to La Crosse" segment is scheduled and budgeted, even if the trade-off is that such a schedule and budget allocation is a few years off. It is important for all the High

Speed Rail constituencies in Wisconsin, especially for the business community that this plan for rail moves from a "great idea" to a "scheduled outcome".

We also ask for your support of legislation to allow equal authority for communities across the State to create Regional Transit Authorities when such legislation is brought before you.

### *Summary*

High Speed Rail Service to the regional metro-markets via La Crosse will be a significant catalyst for economic development throughout the State of Wisconsin, not only by allowing business people to easily reach these important markets with only a one day trip but also by encouraging tourism and leisure travel throughout Wisconsin. High Speed Passenger Rail is a good public policy approach to providing a viable alternative for business and leisure travelers.

*Contributed by the La Crosse Area Development Corporation*



# Tourism Promotion & Marketing

## *Position Statement*

Continued and increased promotion of the plethora of tourism and travel opportunities throughout Wisconsin is an integral element of healthy communities and economic development.

## *Background*

Tourism is one of the largest industries in Wisconsin and provides over 300,000 full time equivalent jobs. These are jobs that help individuals put food on the table and are family owned businesses that have been operated by the same families for multiple generations. These are also key management positions like general managers, executive chefs, building engineers, sales managers and many other full-time permanent positions. In these difficult economic times when budgets are being squeezed, we should all be looking especially hard at investing in programs that generate revenues.

### **2008 Facts about Wisconsin Tourism:**

- ▶ Generated over \$13 billion in travel related spending
- ▶ Generated almost \$656 million in state sales tax revenue
- ▶ Generated approximately \$120 million in local sales tax and room tax revenues

Tourism is a major employer in Western Wisconsin, providing nearly 6,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Driven by the beauty of our area with the Mississippi River as the anchor, La Crosse County hosted over 1.5 million visitors in 2008. Visitor spending in La Crosse County generated over \$1 million in sales tax revenue for the State of Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism budget has been cut from \$15 million in the 2007-2009 biennium to \$11 million in the 2009-2011 biennium. One of the many cuts included the elimination of staff at the eight welcome centers at entrances to the State. The Department of Tourism chose not to cut marketing dollars which we applaud. These dollars promote Wisconsin to travelers from around the world but especially our upper Midwest neighbors from Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and the Dakotas. Our industry relies on the State to go into major markets like Detroit, Chicago, Des Moines and the Twin Cities to promote travel to Wisconsin.

**It is difficult for the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to market against Illinois, Michigan and other competing states when the budget gets cut so drastically. Other state tourism budgets include:**

- ▶ Illinois at \$48 million
- ▶ Michigan at \$30 million
- ▶ Minnesota at \$9 million



## We ask the Governor and the Legislature to:

- ▶ Review the cuts made in the Wisconsin Department of Tourism budget
- ▶ Increase advertising spending to increase tourism travel
- ▶ Support the Department of Tourism in their efforts to create new and expanded ways to attract visitors to Wisconsin



Photo courtesy of LACVB

## Summary

Investing in tourism has a direct impact on all of us because visitor spending creates revenue for the State of Wisconsin as well as local governments and businesses. On average, an overnight Wisconsin visitor spends \$125 per day which does not include local and state sales taxes or hotel lodging taxes. Visitor spending helps everyone and increasing the State's marketing dollars would further drive this economic engine. The Department of Tourism is an asset we need to invest dollars in so it can help grow our economy.

*Contributed by the La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau*

## *The Importance of the Group Tour Market to the La Crosse Area Economy*

Each year, the La Crosse Area Convention & Visitors Bureau works diligently on a sales and marketing campaign to tour operators and group leaders to encourage them to choose the La Crosse Area as a destination for a Wisconsin tour itinerary. This is done with the help of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism through Circle Wisconsin. In 2008 La Crosse hosted 298 bus tour groups, nearly half of which included at least one overnight stay. A modest estimate for return on investment follows:

- ▶ Day Trip – 38 passenger average x \$ 70.00 per passenger = \$ 2,660 per day
- ▶ Overnight Trip – 38 passenger average x \$ 125.00 per passenger = \$ 4,750 per day

Tour Operators package each tour differently with most including an attraction, dining and shopping. Many of these attractions are non-profit organizations that depend on group tours to help them make their budget goals. When you add in the lodging component, the motor coach needs, such as fuel and other services, plus incidental spending, many businesses are affected when a motor coach tour comes to an area. In 2008 motor coach groups generated well over \$1 million for the La Crosse economy.

It is important to maintain a steady base of funding to continue to attract the Group Tour Market to Wisconsin and the La Crosse Area. The return on the investment is critical to our local economy.

# *Equal Authorization for Regional Transit Authority*

## *Position Statement*

The La Crosse/ La Crescent Metropolitan Area requests legislation allowing for the creation of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

## *Background*

The lack of the ability to create an RTA in the La Crosse Area has left the annual funding of public transportation up to the several municipalities, with no regional coordination or long term regional outlook and an inability to co-mingle funds from multiple municipalities. The ability to form an RTA is a critical piece of the La Crosse/ La Crescent areas' regional economic development plans. There are several benefits of coordinated public transit to businesses and to the communities which the RTA would serve. An RTA is critical to the successful and sustainable growth of the region.

## **Benefits to Businesses and Employees:**

- ▶ Employees' time savings, potentially leading to lower operating costs to employers.
- ▶ Increased pool of employees.
- ▶ Increased pool of consumers.
- ▶ La Crosse's new transit center is a logical hub for ridership transfer.
- ▶ Increased access for employees' education and training needs.
- ▶ Potential for lower property taxes due to a decrease infrastructure investment needs.



*Grand River Station – transit center in Downtown La Crosse under construction*

## Benefits to the Communities Participating in the RTA:

- ▶ Rural mobility (rural riders would likely be the elderly, young, low income, and individuals with disabilities).
- ▶ Ensures a higher quality of life for ALL citizens by giving everyone reasonable access to critical destinations (health care facilities, schools, stores, etc.).
- ▶ Decreases congestion, therefore decreasing the need to build new parking ramps, hire more traffic police, build more stop lights, etc.
- ▶ Provides for job access to low income individuals and those with disabilities.
- ▶ Decreases the amount of greenhouse gas emissions which provides for the potential of higher air quality.

### *Summary*

Currently, the decelerating growth trends of the La Crosse/ La Crescent Metropolitan Area are leading to municipal and

county-wide budget deficits, largely due to infrastructure needs caused by increased traffic from rural areas into the City of La Crosse. Studies show that 70% of the County's jobs are in the City of La Crosse, and 60% of suburban workers commute into the City of La Crosse to get to their jobs. The formation of an RTA with taxing authority and independent governing authority is crucial to addressing these issues, and will be critical to ensuring sustainable economic growth for the area.

*Contributed by the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce*



*Photo courtesy of LACVB*



*Photo courtesy of LACVB*

# Oktoberfest in the Capitol 2009

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