

# Blog Post: Gov. Walker Not So Lucky in his Request for High Speed Rail Funds

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When the U.S. Department of Transportation announced the states that had applied for high speed rail grants last month – made available after Florida Governor Rick Scott rejected the funds – I was surprised to see Wisconsin on the list. A bad joke? No, five months after sending \$810 million in already approved passenger rail funds back to the federal government, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker re-applied for funds he previously renounced to invest in Milwaukee-to-Chicago rail service. Scott Walker showed all the logic of a man who throws out a winning lottery ticket, grabs his coat, and then heads out the door to buy another one.

Unfortunately for the people of Wisconsin, Gov. Walker's second lottery ticket was not a winner. In the grant awards announced May 9, Wisconsin did not receive any of the money being redistributed from Florida. But given Gov. Walker's short-sighted actions and overheated rhetoric on this issue, there's little wonder why.

Working people in Wisconsin were – I'm sure – apoplectic when he rejected high speed rail funds for his state in December. That decision doomed thousands of jobs, and in fact, sent those job-creating projects to other states.

I've never seen governors in a race to see who can ship more jobs out of their state. This isn't hyperbole by a bored blogger – it is really happening. Governor Walker, already working full-time to eliminate the bargaining rights of Wisconsin's public sector workers, turned away federal investments for high speed rail to the tune of 14,000 jobs. Governor John Kasich (R-OH) turned away \$400 million and 16,000 jobs. Governor Rick Scott (R-FL) said no to \$2.4 billion for the state's ambitious passenger rail plan resulting in 48,000 lost jobs. And similarly, Governor Chris Christie (R-NJ) killed the nation's largest infrastructure project – a train tunnel under the Hudson River – badly undermining the state's economy and transportation future and sacking 51,000 jobs.

In this race, there are no winners. Our jobless and under-employed rates remain too high and our transportation system and infrastructure are falling apart. The experts at the American Society of Civil Engineers give America's infrastructure a "D" grade with \$2.2 trillion in unmet needs. This is a reflection of the gross lack of understanding by our political leaders that America will not be the world's leading economy in the 21st century if our transportation system is stuck in the 20th century.

A surface transportation bill that approaches President Obama's proposed funding levels, \$556 billion, would begin to address our investment deficit. And the 7 million jobs it would create will bend the unemployment curve in the right direction. Wow, what a stark contrast to the ridiculous antics of some of the states' chief executives.

The problem is that too many politicians treat these long-term investments as if they are wasteful pork barrel spending. Perhaps we should conduct workshops for certain Members of Congress and governors on this subject. Investment in a new transit system or bridge that lasts for decades, for example, isn't the same as yet another wasteful corporate subsidy or tax cut for the super wealthy. That is why it was appalling to see the Ryan Budget cut future transportation investments by 30 percent while also giving more than a trillion dollars in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires. That budget blueprint would destroy well over 500,000 good transportation jobs and absolutely doom our transportation system for a generation.

You can't boost the economy and create jobs by bankrupting the very programs that have a history of robust job creation. And politicians will not solve federal and state budget challenges, and an anemic

economy, by destroying thousands of private and public sector jobs. Wisconsin and other states need visionary leaders, not governors who treat their chief executive functions as auditions for future jobs in front of the most extreme elements of their party.

These latest events are bizarre indeed. And I couldn't make up these stories if I tried. I do wish the people of Wisconsin well, and believe that they would have been well-served by investment in the Milwaukee-to-Chicago passenger rail line at this time. But Gov. Walker's actions had consequences. Throwing away that winning lottery ticket was not smart. Expecting to receive funding approval for a second time when you turned it down in the first place was nothing more than wishful thinking.

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