

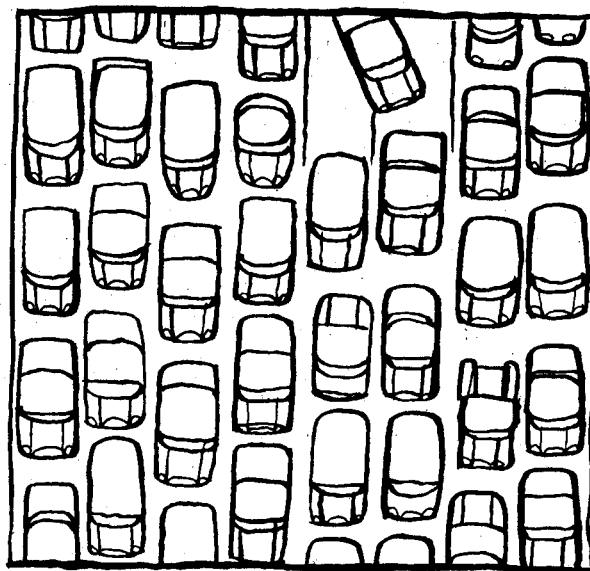
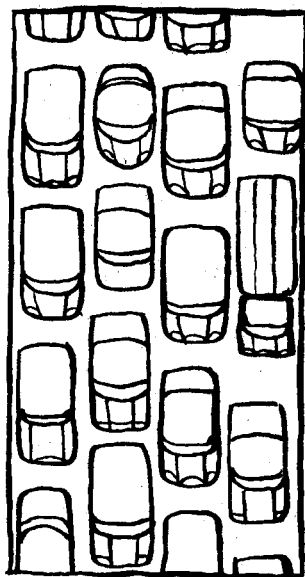
# INTERSTATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN...

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OUR PERSPECTIVE

## Metra expansion receives support

The proposed extension of Metra commuter rail from Kenosha through Racine, Caledonia and on north to Milwaukee is beginning to look like the "Little Engine That Could."

Under a deal announced Monday, southeastern Wisconsin leaders agreed to move ahead with planning for Metra expansion and urged the use of \$91.5 million in unused federal money that had originally been earmarked for a Milwaukee guided electric bus system.

While that's not a done deal — the funding switch still would need the approval of both Gov. Jim Doyle and the federal government — it now has the backing of both Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist and Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker.

If it goes through, it would mean the commuter rail extension linking Chicago and Milwaukee would have almost two-thirds of the financial commitment needed to clear the tracks for operation of the \$152 million system.

The steps this week also mean the way is open for continued work on the commuter project for the next couple of years — work that must also sort out the responsibilities for operation of the system and the financing.

Last week Racine Mayor Gary Becker and Racine County Executive William McReynolds both said they would find some dollars to help the engineering studies move forward.

Becker said he will include \$35,000 for the engineering work in his capital improvements budget for each of the next two years while McReynolds said he would be all right with the work if Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce is able to raise a similar amount.

"The benefits are huge for Racine and for the whole Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee-Chicago region. It's an investment we would be foolish not to make."

We concur.

A viable commuter rail system could be a valuable alternative to the increasing gridlock found on our interstate highway system and would assure commuting workers and area residents of a reliable and timely transportation alternative in the southeastern Wisconsin corridor.

For some residents that will open the door to new or better jobs and conversely, for some businesses it will improve their access to a broader labor market.

Commuter rail is not free. It will require a public financing commitment just as we now pump billions into the maintenance of our streets and highways, but it will give us a more balanced transportation system, ease the pressure on our interstates and create choices and opportunities for working and traveling in southeastern Wisconsin and beyond.