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For immediate release

Public Policy Forum receives national award for transit research

Milwaukee County's transit crisis draws attention of judging panel

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – Monday, August 3, 2009 – The Public Policy Forum's landmark report, *Milwaukee County's Transit Crisis: How Did We Get Here and What Do We Do Now*, has received the Governmental Research Association's (GRA) award for "Most Effective Education" on a local government issue. The Forum was presented the award on July 28 at the GRA's annual conference in Washington, D.C.

When the report was issued in May 2008, it received immediate and widespread media attention throughout southeastern Wisconsin and initiated considerable public discussion among government and community leaders about how to solve the decades-long financial crisis of Milwaukee County's bus system.

"Our report served as a key catalyst in heightening the debate over solving the region's transit problems by establishing a base of objective, nonpartisan research that argued for immediate action on a problem that has festered for years," says Forum President Henken. "Our approach was based on the premise that a solution should not be dictated by one's view on taxation, but by

one's view on whether a reasonable level of public transit service is essential to the region's social and economic well-being."

In addition to garnering media attention for the report, the Forum embarked upon a comprehensive public education effort that, according to Henken, "helped produce a level of political resolve to address this problem that never had existed previously."

Thirteen presentations were made by Forum staff to civic organizations or governmental entities, including committees of the Milwaukee County Board and City of Milwaukee Common Council, the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority, Intergovernmental Coordinating Council, Urban Economic Development Association, and various Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, among others.

The Forum's report proposed the need for a "triage" approach to stabilize the county transit system's finances and service in the short term. Henken pointed out that such an approach may remain relevant today in light of continued gridlock over a permanent, state-authorized funding solution.

"While a dedicated funding source appears necessary to permanently address the transit system's structural budget problems," Henken says, "the data indicate that, in the meantime, it is critical to hold the line on fare increases and service cuts for at least the next two to four years to help stabilize or even begin to grow ridership, and to take other prudent steps to reduce the magnitude of a full-fledged funding crisis when significant bus purchases are required."

This is the fourth award since 2002 that the Forum has received from the GRA, which was founded in 1914, as the national organization of individuals involved in government research. GRA's annual awards competition is conducted to "recognize exceptional research on state and local governmental issues performed by staff members of governmental research agencies."

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

The award-winning report can be downloaded by clicking [here](#).

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