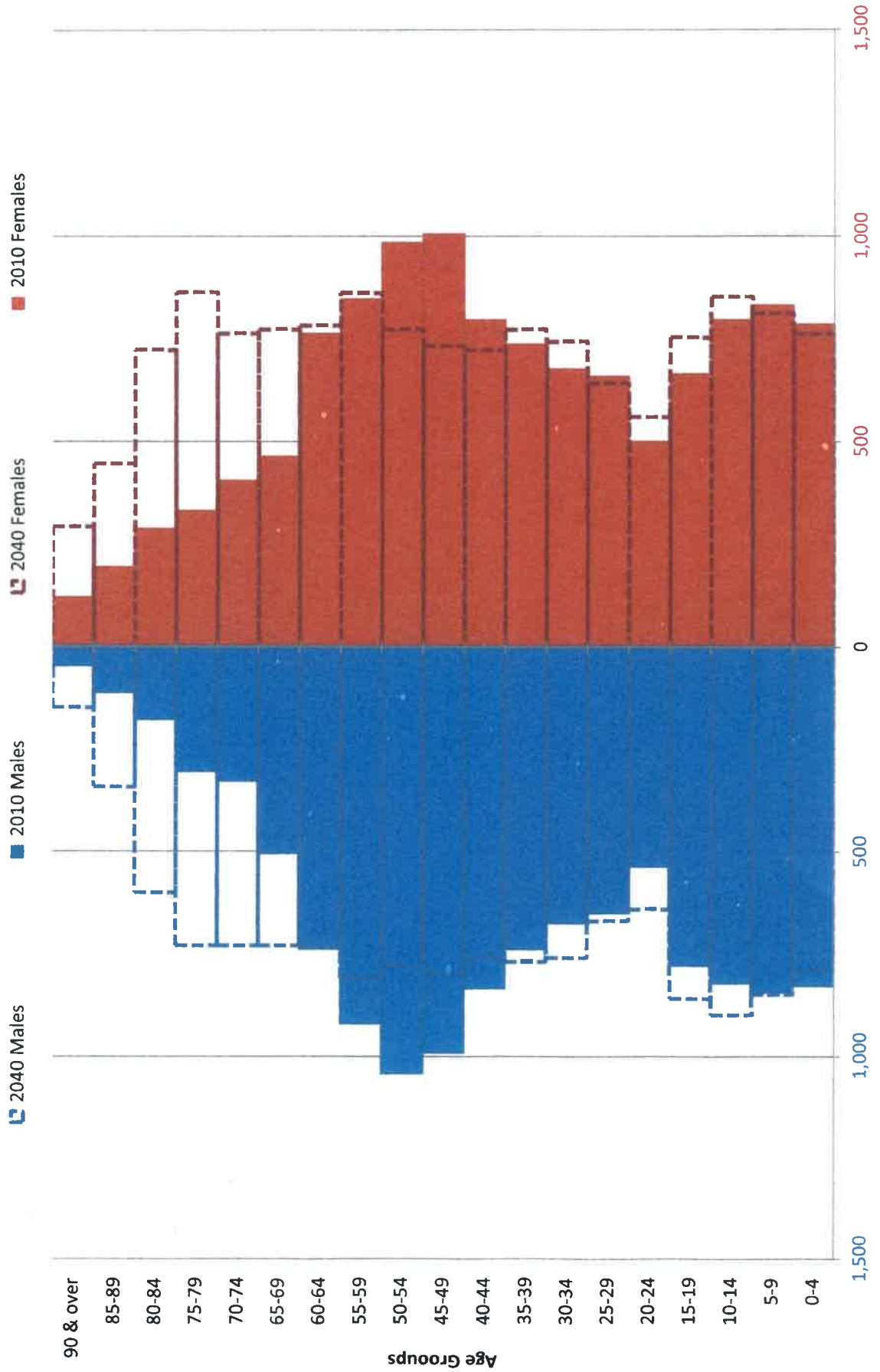


Handout

Iowa County Age-Sex Pyramid, 2010 and 2040 Population Projections



Handout

Leaders express concern over state 'wheel tax' bill

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PLATTEVILLE, Wis. — In a move to “empower taxpayers,” a Wisconsin lawmaker has proposed legislation that would require municipalities to obtain voter approval before imposing a local vehicle registration fee, also known as a “wheel tax.”

Municipalities where the fee already exists would likewise have to obtain support from a majority of voters at a regularly scheduled election to continue to charge residents if the measure — proposed by Sen. David Craig, R-Big Bend — is signed into law.

The proposal has the potential to reduce the funding local governments have available for transportation projects.

“While I understand that nobody looks forward to paying the wheel tax, it has been a tremendous help to us,” said Karen Kurt, Platteville city manager.

The community instituted a wheel tax in 2017. In 2018, the city derived \$115,028 from its \$20-per-vehicle fee, which funded its street-overlay program.

Under state regulations, funds collected through wheel taxes may be used only to finance transportation projects.

The Senate and accompanying Assembly bills have been sent to committees for review.

Southwest Wisconsin lawmakers have not co-sponsored the legislation, but one has expressed support for its underlying rationale.

“By and large, we want citizens to participate

in their democracy,” said Rep. Travis Tranel, R-Cuba City.

Tranel said the Legislature has raised transportation aid multiple times in recent years, but costs for road construction projects continue to increase.

The state’s budget-writing committee recently approved the allocation of funds to finance a 10% increase for general transportation aid to municipalities and counties and a one-time allocation of \$90 million for county, town and municipal road projects in 2019-20.

Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, who sits on the committee, did not respond to messages seeking comment for this story.

To help finance the increase, the state budget committee proposed a \$10 vehicle registration fee increase and \$95 increase to vehicle title transactions and transfers.

The double standard is not lost on Jerry Deschane, executive director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, who called the wheel tax bill “an affront to representative democracy.”

“They are imposing one set of restrictions on local government officials that they wouldn’t ever impose on themselves,” he said.

Deschane said the state is driving municipalities to impose measures like wheel taxes because it has failed to pass a “sustainable” transportation budget.

David Carlson, administrator of the City of Lancaster, said the Common Council has not expressed an interest in imposing a wheel tax, but he is nonetheless “not a fan” of the proposed legislation.

“When the Legislature does something like this, it limits the ability of municipalities to use appropriate revenue methods to pay for needed public utilities,” he said.



Karen Kurt



Travis Tranel