



**GREATER  
LA CROSSE**



**ADVOCACY DAY**

**AT THE CAPITOL**

**MARCH 18, 2025**

# **GREATER LA CROSSE ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL 2025**



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# GREATER LA CROSSE ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL

The La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to represent the interests of our region's businesses during our annual Advocacy Day in Madison. As the voice of the business community, we are committed in Greater La Crosse to fostering a vibrant economy and advocating for policies that make La Crosse and Wisconsin a better place to live and do business. This year, we bring an agenda addressing key issues impacting our members and their employees, including workforce development, education, infrastructure investment, and public health. We sincerely appreciate your consideration and thank you for meeting with the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce. Below you will find a summary of the four main issues we will be discussing today:

## 1. **Prairie Springs Science Center Completion Project Funding**

- Support full funding for the completion of the Prairie Springs Science Center at UW-La Crosse. This investment enhances STEM education and supports workforce development critical to our region's industries.

## 2. **La Crosse Corridor Construction Funding**

- Prioritize funding for improvements to our major corridors (US 53, US 14/61, WIS 35, and WIS 16) to enhance transportation infrastructure, improve safety, and support economic activity in Western Wisconsin.

## 3. **PFAS Mitigation Funding**

- Support Governor Evers proposed 2025-27 Executive Budget to invest \$145M to fight PFAS statewide.

## 4. **Child Care Investments & Initiatives**

- Support funding Child Care Counts program \$480 million over the biennium to continue the successful Child Care Counts Program.
- Support additional childcare programs such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

# Thank you for investing in La Crosse!

**Borealis Am-Trak Service:** Thank you for including over \$900,000 in the 2023-25 biennial budget to assist in the creation of the Borealis passenger train service. This important investment helped create a second-round trip train to meet the demands of travelers in the region.



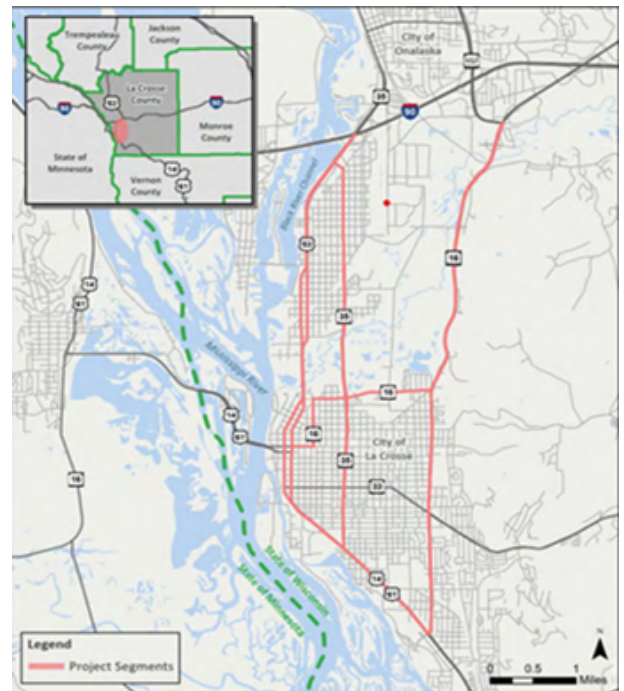
## Borealis & La Crosse

- Allows travelers two options to depart and arrive in La Crosse
- Tourism drove \$304M To La Crosse economy in 2023
- Success resulted in \$38M in federal funds to fully fund the service through 2030
- Exceeded 100,000 riders in only 22 weeks

**La Crosse Corridor Study Funding:** Our community would like to thank the State Legislature and the Wisconsin Transportation Project Commission for approving a new study to evaluate new alternatives to address the condition of our main corridors which include US 53, US 14/61, WIS 35, and WIS 16.

## Study History:

- 90s-Original Study was initiated
- 2006- Re-examined as the Coulee Connections Study
- 2016- Paused
- 2021- New Study approved
- 2025- Public Involvement meetings



# Prairie Springs Science Center Completion Project

La Crosse, Wisconsin, is home to two of the largest healthcare institutions in the Upper Midwest—Emplify Health by Gundersen and Mayo Clinic Health System—employing nearly 20,000 healthcare professionals. In addition, major employers like Trane Technologies, Kwik Trip, Inc., J.F. Brennan, and Dairyland Power Cooperative play a critical role in our regional economy. These industry leaders have a strong and growing demand for graduates in STEM disciplines, making the realization of the Prairie Springs Science Center Completion Project a vital investment in our entire region's future. Finishing this state-of-the-art facility will strengthen Greater La Crosse's position as a hub for innovation, ensuring Wisconsin attracts and retains top talent from across the Midwest.

## Universities of Wisconsin #1 Priority on Major Capitol Projects List



- **STEM Workforce Development:** Nearly 87% of UW-L's College of Science & Health graduates remain in Wisconsin, contributing to local industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, and technology.
- **Economic Investment:** Delays in funding have escalated the project's cost from an initial \$93 million to approximately \$182 million, reflecting the financial impact of postponements.
- **Facility Modernization:** The existing Cowley Hall, built in the 1960s, is outdated and costly to maintain. Completing the Prairie Springs Science Center will replace this facility, providing state-of-the-art laboratories and classrooms essential for contemporary STEM education.
- **Donor Support:** Since 2018, donors have contributed over \$15 million to enhance UW-L's STEM education.

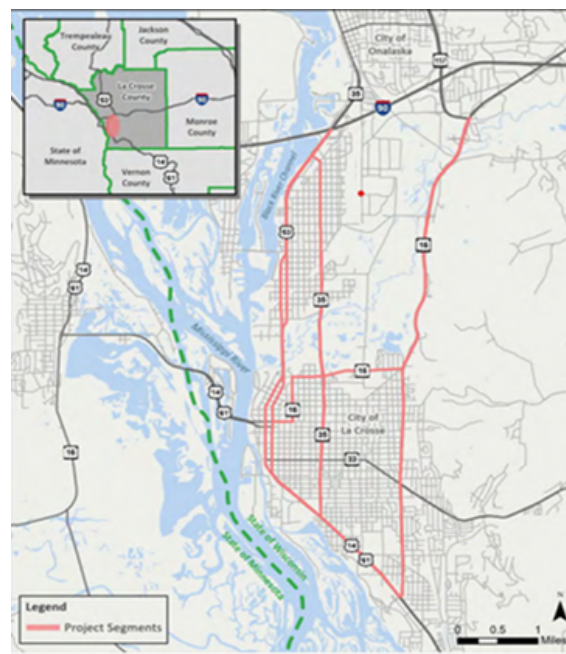
**Our ask: Fully fund the Prairie Springs Science Center Completion Project to build Wisconsin's STEM workforce.**

# Transportation

## La Crosse Corridor Funding:

The City of La Crosse, bordered by the Mississippi and Black Rivers to the west, steep bluffs to the east, and bisected by the La Crosse River and wetlands, generates over \$300 million annually in tourism. However, our geography constrains major highway corridors, particularly downtown. While an initial study in the 1990s addressed this issue, progress stalled until a new study began in 2021, now engaging the public and community stakeholders.

**Our ask: Fully fund the La Crosse corridor projects once the study is complete and funding becomes available through the Major Highway Projects line item. This project is enumerated under a previous enumeration from the 1990's.**



### Corridor Facts:

- These corridors include US 53, US 14/61, WIS 35, and WIS 16
- Corridor access includes Historic Downtown La Crosse, UW-La Crosse, Western, Viterbo, Mayo Clinic, Emplify, and the Mississippi River
- Our unique geography makes these projects important because of the natural constraints
- Hwy 53 goes through our award-winning historic downtown with 43 Historic places on the National Register



## PFAS Mitigation Funding

In the 2023-2025 State Budget, Wisconsin allocated \$125 million in state funds for PFAS cleanup and mitigation as part of a broader biennial budget. However, due to competing opinions about the use of these funds and accountability questions, these funds have not been disbursed. This has left La Crosse County, the City of La Crosse, and the Town of Campbell with contaminated water and large expenses to solve the issue temporarily.



### How has this impacted Greater La Crosse?

- 4,300 residents have contaminated wells
- 1,650 households in total, and growing
- 1 elementary school
- 30+ businesses
- French Island is home to the United States Geological Site's (USGS) Upper Midwest Environmental Center

**Our ask: Please resolve the conflict surrounding the PFAS mitigation funding and allow the funds to be allocated to the communities in need through the DNR.**

- **Support Governor Evers' proposed 2025-27 Executive Budget to invest \$145M to fight PFAS statewide**

## Advocating for Accessible and Affordable Childcare in Wisconsin

The La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to advocating for policies that support working families and businesses. Access to quality, affordable childcare is essential for a strong workforce and a thriving economy. As we head to Madison, we urge lawmakers to take action on critical childcare funding and policy initiatives.

### Our Priorities:

#### Support Funding for Child Care Counts:

We support allocating \$480 million over the biennium to sustain the successful Child Care Counts program. This funding ensures that childcare providers can continue offering high-quality care while keeping costs manageable for families. Without this support, many childcare centers face financial instability, leading to potential closures and reduced access for working parents.

#### Expand Support for Additional Childcare Programs:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) play a crucial role in providing resources to families in need. Expanding funding and access to these programs can help more parents stay in the workforce while ensuring their children receive quality care.

#### Childcare in the Greater La Crosse:

- 29% of family childcare programs plan to close within the next 2 years – the most common reason being retirement
- 70% of group childcare centers are operating under capacity due to workforce challenges
- Average starting pay for a full-time teacher qualified position in group childcare centers - \$16.53/hr
- 70% of family child care programs are already planning a tuition increase in 2025

*\*Information above provided by the Parenting Place from the City of La Crosse Child Care Development Project 2025 Survey*

**Our ask: Support funding Child Care Counts program \$480 million over the biennium to continue the successful Child Care Counts Program. Support additional childcare programs such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).**