



Federal Court Finds Faith, Community Health Groups Likely to Succeed on Merits Of Challenge to Zoo Interchange Project

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CONTACT: Stacy Harbaugh, Midwest Environmental Associates, (608) 251-5047 ext 1, sharbaugh@midwestadvocates.org;
Sarah Karon, ACLU of Wisconsin, (608) 469-5540, skaron@aclu-wi.org

MILWAUKEE — On Friday, a federal judge issued a decision in a case seeking to block the expansion of the Zoo Interchange. The court determined that the Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin (BHCW) and Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICA H) were likely to succeed on the merits of their claims that state and federal transportation officials violated federal law by failing to fully evaluate the project's environmental and related social and economic impacts.

While the court has not yet blocked the highway expansion project, BHCW and MICA H were pleased with the ruling.

"One of MICA H's biggest concerns is the extreme rate of joblessness in the central city for persons of color in general and African-American men in particular," said Rev. Willie Brisco, president of MICA H. "People of color are much more likely to depend on transit to get to work. We agree with the judge, that the Zoo project staff didn't look at the issue of what happens to our communities when highway project after highway project is built and transit is left behind."

"We spend a lot of time working on health issues related to air quality, and one of the things the judge found was that transportation officials didn't consider the air quality effects related to the loss of transit," said Dr. Patricia McManus, president and CEO of BHCW. "As an organization that believes you cannot have healthy people in a sick community, we're also glad that the court recognized there are concerns about not addressing suburban sprawl and the lack of transit which our community needs to access healthcare, education, and employment."

BHCW and MICA H are represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin Foundation Attorney Karyn Rotker and by Midwest Environmental Advocates Attorney Dennis Grzezinski, who added that they hope that state and federal transportation officials will take seriously language in the court's opinion that they consider alternatives to address the community's public transit needs.

The court also determined that a hearing is needed to determine certain facts, such as whether and to what extent project delays might or might not impose other costs. The date of the hearing will be determined on May 28.

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