

Exclusive: DOT Kills Plans To Develop Park/Ride Lots Near Delafield And Hartland; Will Sell Off Hartland Land

I have learned the state Department of Transportation is killing plans to do multi-use developments at the large Park and Ride Lots on I-94 near Delafield and Highway 16 and 83 near Hartland. The decision was made by State Transportation Secretary Dave Ross following my inquiries about why DOT is suddenly getting into the land development business.

DOT officials made a full-bore pitch last week to the Delafield Plan Commission to seek developers for a mixed-use restaurant and retail complex at the sprawling I-94 lot. Similar plans were in the works for Hartland. DOT had obtained land adjacent to the Park and Ride lot in Hartland but was planning to use the lot itself in Delafield. In a statement, Ross said he is nixing both projects and instructing staffers to sell the adjacent land in Hartland.

Ross said he wants to focus all of DOT's efforts on infrastructure. The decision is a total reversal of what had been in the works.

On my program this week, I have been questioning why DOT would be getting involved in developing government land that would compete with nearby commercial businesses and why DOT, which is the subject of intense controversy over Wisconsin road construction funding, would be delving into an area no one has asked them to move into. Ross' decision came after two days of DOT officials ducking my questions about the projects. It is apparent that my inquiries led to Ross' decision to re-think both projects and ultimately kill them off.

Democrats have been blasting Governor Walker over transportation funding and some legislative Republicans have been pushing for tax hikes to increase transportation funding.

I have long argued that DOT's Madison offices are packed with central planners who do an awful job managing road projects and have long been too cozy with road builders who obtain inflated contracts for major projects. The decision to seek private developers to do mini-malls at Park and Ride lots seemed to be part of that pattern. Now, Ross has intervened and killed the projects. Both projects originated under the leadership of former DOT Secretary Mark Gottlieb. It is unclear if Governor Walker intervened here, but it wouldn't surprise me.

If there is a need for restaurant and retail development near Hartland and Delafield (two areas that are booming), I contend there is more than enough existing private land for developers to try to take advantage of.

Mark Belling
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