

EXCLUSIVE: State DOT Drops Penalties Against Contractor Who Botched Major Racine County Project

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

As reported exclusively on my radio program yesterday, officials at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation have waived previously announced penalties against a contractor involved in a Racine County project that took months longer than expected to complete and resulted in the closing for a year of a major road.

The project is the repaving of County MM in Mount Pleasant in Racine County. It was funded 80 percent by the state and 20 percent by Racine County. The contractor, Cornerstone Pavers of Caledonia, was severely blasted by both the Racine Mayor and Racine County Executive for the botched project. The city placed Cornerstone on its non-compliance list, meaning the company is not eligible for any future work. Racine County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, likewise disgusted with the company, said he hopes Cornerstone never gets another Racine County job.

Cornerstone project manager Chris Cape blamed, depending on the version he was putting out at the time, the weather, AT&T and other "difficulties" for the delay.

State DOT sued Cornerstone earlier this year. In addition, the company is under fire for major problems on a separate Racine County project in Waterford.

But several days ago, DOT waived all of the fees and agreed to pay Cornerstone a supplemental payment for additional work on the MM project. Craig Thompson, the acting Secretary of Transportation, is the former head of the state trade group that has pushed for more road funding and is closely linked with the state's major road contractors. Thompson and DOT officials have not responded to my questions about whether Thompson personally intervened to pay Cornerstone and waive its penalties. State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, in whose district the project is located,

said he would be very concerned if DOT administrators let Cornerstone off the hook. Vos described the project as a disaster.

I asked Delagrave if Racine County would pay the full 20 percent and Delagrave said the county is required to. Given Delagrave's earlier condemnation of Cornerstone and claims the company did not live up to the contract, his response seems to contradict his earlier statements.

I have complained for years about the cozy relationship between DOT and road contractors but the MM project seems to set a new standard for rewarding contractors for horrible work.

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