



Friends of the Badger and Sugar River State Trails
P.O. Box 141
Belleville, WI 53508

May 20, 2022

Sara Rigelman, Recreation Liaison
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
101 S. Webster St.
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Sara,

Thank you for the invitation to submit a formal statement regarding the Friends' position on possible alternatives for action on the condition and current closure of the Stewart Tunnel.

The Board of Directors of the Friends of the Badger and Sugar River State Trails has reviewed the GEI engineering report and DNR analysis detailing the alternatives for addressing the deterioration, safety and other issues regarding the Stewart Tunnel. After discussion of the report and analysis among the Board members, group members and a private contractor familiar with the composition of the Tunnel and landscape surrounding it, we submit that Alternative 4 represents the most reasonable and desirable solution for the Tunnel's restoration.

That the group would advocate for some form of restoration of the tunnel has never been in question. We know from Friends Group survey data (2019, 2022) as well as informal conversation that the Stewart Tunnel has value to the communities along the Badger trail for many reasons. In addition to its recreational value, attracting tourists and locals year round who enjoy walking or bicycling through the tunnel, it is also an historical and cultural icon. The Stewart Tunnel played a role in the lives of the families that grew up in the trail's adjacent communities for over 130 years. That role has expanded –and become more personal to people- since the late 1990s, when it became more accessible after the DNR procured the land and began converting it to trail in 2000.

We believe Alternative 4 (installation of corrugated metal pipe lining along the sides of the tunnel) balances the needs of existing trail users, as well as the region's communities, with those of the ecosystem in which the Tunnel is situated--particularly the vulnerable bat population that has made the tunnel its winter home. Installing corrugated metal pipe tunnel lining and keeping a 2 foot interstitial space between the fill and tunnel ceiling appears to have worked well as a solution for the Poe Paddy Tunnel in Pennsylvania, which similarly had to balance recreational trail user, ecosystem and bat population needs. The report indicates that this solution "has worked well to protect trail users from falling rock while also maintaining their bat habitat." (GEI Report 21B1I, p.9) The public seems to be pleased with the solution and

the tunnel has even seen an increase in the bat population. A highlight of this popular Pennsylvania State Park, this destination feature is a significant draw for locals and tourists alike, contributing to the region's economy. Communities along the Badger State trail, particularly those that draw bicyclists, have already started to feel some impacts from the Stewart Tunnel closure--impacts that will increase if it were to be permanently closed.

While the cost of this alternative is high (\$3,480,000) it requires little in ongoing maintenance costs in comparison to restoration Alternatives 2 (Ceiling Netting) and 3 (Steel Framing), the former of which would further endanger the bat population. Alternative 5 (Concrete Lining) is more expensive and, as far as we can tell, less optimal for the bats, as it would not contain the protective interstitial space between the fill and the top of the existing tunnel ceiling.

Finally, given that Alternative 4 could not begin to be implemented until the DNR 2023-25 budget is approved and funds are secured for the reconstruction, the Board will also advocate for a short-term solution. The most cost-effective and reasonable short-term solution appears to be to create a ramped pedestrian-only, unpaved pathway over the tunnel, which may be feasible within the existing right-of-way, as detailed on page 25 of the [DNR's Stewart Tunnel Alternatives Analysis](#).

The Board of the Friends of the Badger Sugar River State Trails is committed to working with the Wisconsin DNR and the State and Federal governments to ensure the viable implementation of a reasonable and sustainable plan for restoring the Stewart Tunnel. We have begun the work of exploring partners and strategies for fundraising, and are considering the possibility of establishing an endowment. While we can take little action with a decision by the DNR pending, we are pleased to be counted as a partner and advocate in this important restoration project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



Anne Gravel Sullivan, President
Friends of the Badger and Sugar River State Trails
P.O. Box 141
Belleville, WI 53508
Sundog15@gmail.com
608-279-3407