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POLICY BRIEF

ARPA Spending in Milwaukee

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Key Takeaways

In March 2021, Congress passed the ARPA, which authorized \$1.9 trillion of spending in the US.

About \$5.7 billion of that is going to Wisconsin. The City of Milwaukee is slated to receive roughly \$394 million, in the form of two equally-sized tranches, disbursed in 2021 (which is already allocated) and 2022 (which is not completely allocated yet). While Milwaukee has already decided how to spend about 75% of their overall ARPA funding,ⁱ that leaves roughly \$100 million yet to be allocated, meaning the City Council and Mayor still have some decisions to make.

This report recaps some of the distributions and line items of Wisconsin ARPA spending so far while also providing some ideas for how Milwaukee in particular can spend ARPA money, including:

- **Education:** Milwaukee can spend ARPA money to fund summer school programs to make up for proficiency lost during remote learning and to expand broadband in the city to ensure that poorer children have the ability to do their homework.
- **Roads:** Milwaukee has the opportunity to work through its backlog of poor-quality roads and make smart purchases for pothole filling while also reconstructing roads that incentivize the alarming issue of reckless driving.
- **Crime:** Milwaukee can help stem their out-of-control crime problem by funding the court system and offering signing bonuses to increase their ranks of policemen.

Introduction

On April 5, Milwaukee residents elected Cavalier Johnson to be just their fourth elected mayor since 1960.ⁱⁱ It's unclear, of course, if Milwaukee's next most powerful public servant will have a tenure anywhere near as long as his recent predecessors', but what is known is that Johnson will have a one-time chance to spend a king's ransom of federal money on Milwaukee.

Background: The ARPA

On March 21, 2021, Congress passed H.R. 1319, the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021” into law.ⁱⁱⁱ The bill may have become law along the slimmest of margins, passing the House by 219-212 and the Senate by 50-49, but the resulting law unleashed about \$1.9 trillion across America, with nearly \$350 billion earmarked for state and local governments.^{iv} The supposed justification for spending the equivalent of nearly 10% of the national GDP^v in a single law was the unique circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, with Congress justifying the spending as “additional relief to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses.”^{vi} For clarity, this law is not to be confused with the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law on March 18, 2020, which spent approximately \$104 billion; nor the CARES Act, signed into law on March 27, 2020, which spent approximately \$2.2 trillion; nor the \$900 billion of additions to the omnibus spending, signed into law on December 21, 2020.^{vii} Indeed, one of the criticisms of this \$1.9 trillion in spending is that it came more than a year after the pandemic ensued and after \$3.7 trillion had already been allocated or spent. (It should also not be confused with the \$1.2 trillion “Infrastructure” bill signed into law eight months after ARPA was.^{viii})

A portion of the ARPA money went to Wisconsin—a total of some \$5.7 billion.^{ix} Early estimates of the breakdown indicate Wisconsin cities receiving \$788 million and Wisconsin counties receiving \$1.13 billion.^x The City of Milwaukee was allotted about \$394.2 million,¹ half of which has already been received (the second half will be received later this year).^{xi} This two-tranche division of ARPA funding is the norm; Green Bay, for instance, has already received the first half of their \$23.7 million, with the second half to be received later in 2022.^{xii}

It's worth discussing the wisdom of planning to spend this kind of a fortune over the course of years with no specific purpose in sight. Even supporters of big-government economic stimulus voiced some concerns at the time; former economic adviser to President Obama Lawrence Summers wrote in February of 2021, “there is a chance that macroeconomic stimulus on a scale closer to World War II levels [i.e. the \$1.9 trillion proposed] than normal recession levels will set

¹ “The ARPA grant will . . . provide approximately \$394,226,649 to the City of Milwaukee through the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (LFRF).” <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5147606&GUID=FF6A7E01-0B85-4C98-87C4-C91975C3A8A7&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=210894&FullText=1>

off inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation, with consequences for the value of the dollar and financial stability.”^{xiii} Indeed.

The City of Milwaukee didn’t even have the sort of clear and present needs that you might expect would have required this gigantic spending in the first place. “Prior to appropriating its [ARPA] funds,” the City website notes, they administered a public survey “to identify the funding priorities of survey respondents in the areas of housing access, eviction prevention, internet access, early childhood education, economic and workforce development, infrastructure and transportation, public health, and public safety.”^{xiv} The City of Green Bay also conducted a survey to inquire about people’s preferences for the money.^{xv}

“This is pure lunacy,” commented Mike Konecny, the owner of a financial consulting firm in Green Bay, upon the passage of ARPA.^{xvi} People will recall that in the initial emergency posed by the novel coronavirus, state and local governments panicked about revenue evaporating and not being able to fund essential services or pensions. CNN reported in April 2020 how “Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell took a hard line . . . against more funding for state and local governments in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, saying that Republicans are not interested in ‘revenue replacement for state governments’ or ‘solving their pension problems.’”^{xvii} This was in response to dire predictions such as those voiced by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who announced that same month they estimated a loss of \$13 billion in tax revenue.^{xviii}

But the prospects of bankruptcy failed to materialize—as did many of their motivating factors. “In many jurisdictions, overall revenues have not changed,” notes Konecny. Statewide, for example, Wisconsin tax collections for the 2020-2021 year totaled \$19.5 billion—almost 12% higher than the previous year.^{xix} As late as June 2021, official estimates were still lowballing how much tax revenue the State was going to take in.^{xx} Indeed, as Manitowoc County Executive Bob Ziegelbauer related, “Most counties don’t need this windfall. Counties have made tough decisions year after year to act responsibly with the public’s money. [ARPA] threatens to squander all of that progress by fostering a real sense of dependence on the federal government.”^{xxi} The federal government had already issued out the multiple gargantuan spending bills noted above, many of which were targeted towards specific objectives like unemployment, sick leave, or individual stimulus checks—and by the time ARPA was passed, money was being guaranteed without specific expenses even in mind.

That said, President Biden signed the bill into law and state and local governments are powerless to change that. The only questions are what governments are doing with the funds and what they should do with funds not yet budgeted or received.

Milwaukee and Madison ARPA Spending

In 2021 Milwaukee received the first half of their ARPA funds, roughly \$197,200,000. The single biggest line item went towards something of an accounting trick to stave off a pension crisis: Milwaukee sent ARPA money towards some departments' budgets, freeing up other money to increase the pension reserve fund. As reported by Urban Milwaukee, "The [\$30 million] contribution would create a large enough reserve to delay the city's fiscal cliff by at least one year, from 2023 to 2024, should the city choose to exhaust the full reserve fund (approximately \$82 million). If no action is taken at the state level to support the city (new revenue or pension changes), the cliff would trigger the need for the city to lay off 25% of its workforce."^{xxii} Since funding pensions is an ongoing liability for the City, the use of extraordinary money to keep them afloat is an alarming sign for Milwaukee's finances. That said, using the money in this way is probably not the worst move—even if it does merely stave off disaster for a short while.

So, what sorts of projects has the City of Milwaukee been spending their money on? The City's planned funding tracker indicates that the expenses listed in Table 1 are the 10 most expensive line items so far.^{xxiii} (As of this writing, the tracker has not been updated since April 12, 2022.) Interestingly, only \$13.3 million of the city's ARPA funds have been spent on COVID-19 public health measures, further demonstrating the lack of necessity for ARPA funding to battle the pandemic. The City has also spent significant money on housing measures, including \$15 million for housing renovations and \$9 million to finish Westlawn Gardens, a massive public housing development on the city's north side.

Table 1 City of Milwaukee's 10 Biggest ARPA Line Items

Name	Dept	Area	Budget
Lead Abatement	Health Department	Public Health & Safety	\$26,290,477.00
MFD Emergency Response - Six Engine Companies	Fire Department	Government Services	\$20,833,506.00
In Rem Housing Rehabilitation	City Development	Housing & Neighborhoods	\$15,000,000.00
Covid-19 Public Health Response (Health Dept)	Health Department	Public Health & Safety	\$13,300,000.00
Housing Trust Fund	Department of Administration	Housing & Neighborhoods	\$10,000,000.00
Street Lighting Upgrades	Public Works - Infrastructure	Housing & Neighborhoods	\$10,000,000.00
Westlawn	City Development	Housing & Neighborhoods	\$9,000,000.00
Training Recruits & Cadets	Fire Department	Government Services	\$6,701,239.00

Police - Gun Violence Reduction Project	Police Department	Government Services	\$6,427,734.00
Community Supported Traffic Safety Improvements	Public Works - Infrastructure	Public Health & Safety	\$6,000,000.00

We can get a perspective on the budgeting more generally in Table 2, which uses information compiled by the Brookings Institution (last updated April 13, 2022) to show the portions of money budgeted in different categories so far by the City of Milwaukee, Madison, and Dane County, compared to national averages of those categories. (Brookings has only looked at the ARPA budgeting of so many city/county/state governments, hence the language of “National Sample Average.”²)

Table 2 ARPA Money Budgeted as of April 13, 2022

	National Sample Avg	Milwaukee City	Madison	Dane County
Government Operations	37.6%	1.7%	2.0%	7.6%
Infrastructure	11.9%	20.2%	1.8%	7.6%
Housing	12.5%	32.7%	63.6%	23.6%
Economic & Workforce Development	11.1%	26.8%	19.9%	22.7%
Community Aid	12.3%	2.5%	6.4%	34.8%
Public Safety	2.3%	5.4%	5.9%	0.0%
Public Health	12.2%	10.7%	0.4%	3.8%

Note that Milwaukee County’s spending is not included here because Brookings’ tracker only includes one \$2.7 million grant for eviction prevention; not until June 15 did Milwaukee County unveil an online dashboard detailing the pending and finalized allocations of their \$183,696,190 of ARPA money.^{xxiv} Their allocation categories, though, are rather different: community support, revenue loss, COVID-19 mitigation, and fund administration.

As you can see, Milwaukee City has spent far less than the national average on government operations and far more on areas like housing and workforce development. Madison is following a similar pattern, with the category of “Housing” accounting for a majority of their budgeted ARPA funds. Meanwhile, the category of “Public Health”—the impetus for this spending in the

² Brookings’ methodology explains: “While all metro cities and counties with a population greater than 250,000 were supposed to submit Recovery Plans, there were a handful of cities and counties which had not submitted plans by January 1st of 2022. There was a total of 9 metropolitan cities and 20 metropolitan counties that did not submit Recovery Plan (Table 1). Government entities that did not submit reports are not included in the Local Government ARPA Spend Tracker. Additionally, there were a handful of cities and counties that did not provide projects or include a “Project Inventory” section within their Recovery Plan . . . There were 32 metropolitan cities and 124 metropolitan counties that did not include projects or a Project Inventory section in their Recovery Plan (Table 1).”

https://www.dropbox.com/s/evjjafz9r5axktg/Local%20Government%20Investment%20Tracker%20Methods_4.2022.pdf?dl=0

first place—has received a mere 12% nationally and less than that from Milwaukee and Dane County, and hardly any at all from Madison.

The City of Milwaukee’s own breakdown of funding uses different categories, and is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (Figure 2 is current as of April 12; Figure 1 is their previous iteration).^{xxv} Both figures look at the first tranche of \$197.2 million of ARPA money that has been allocated to Milwaukee, but break them into different buckets.³ Figure 1 shows that “Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities” was the largest funding category under the previous iteration. It is unclear why the City changed these categories, though a blend of both would be more accurate and transparent.

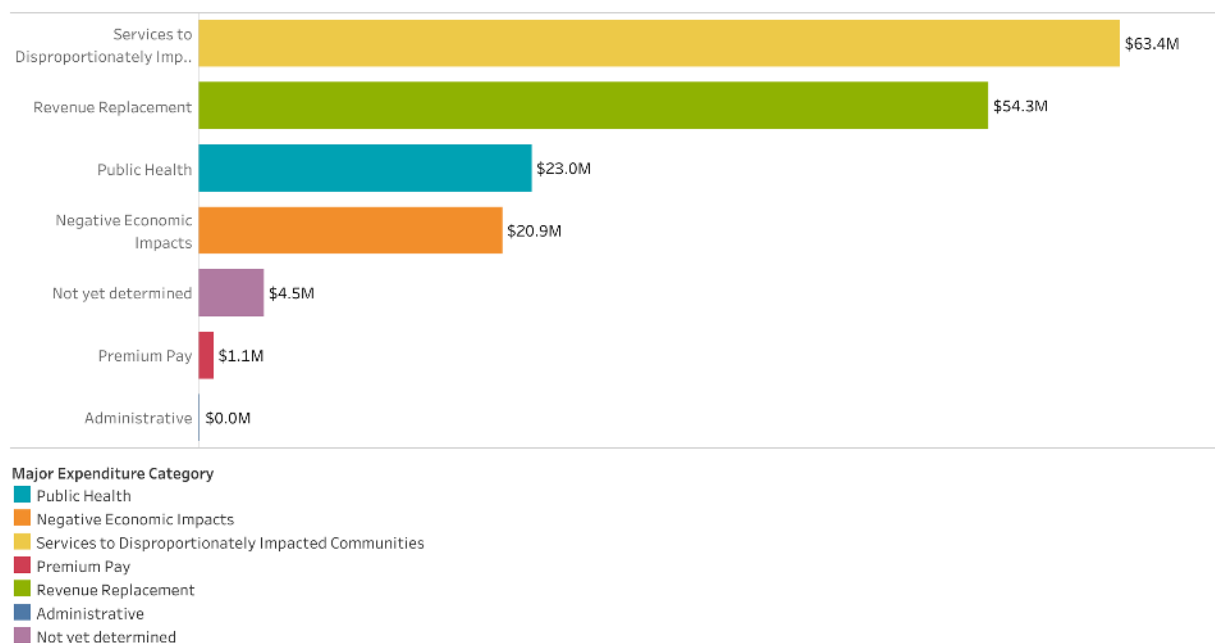


Figure 1 City of Milwaukee's Funding Plan

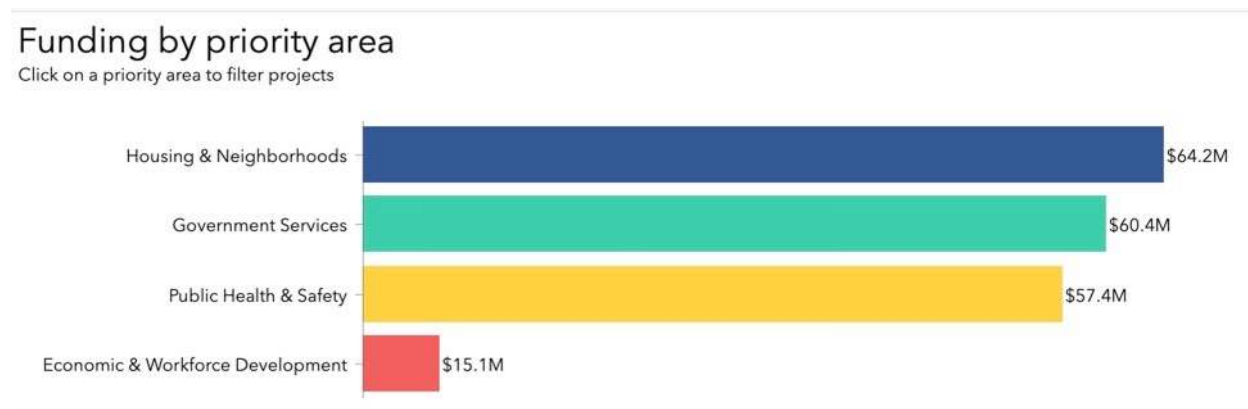


Figure 2 City of Milwaukee's Funding Plan (Current)

³ Figure 1, for unclear reasons, omits the \$30 million used to fund pensions; thus, its numbers sum to \$167.2 million. Figure 2 includes that money.

Note that the current bar graph tracker, for reasons not explained, is either not to scale or cut off. (The red bar, which is only a tiny fraction of the turquoise one, represents fully one-fourth as much money as it.)

All told, a lot of the generic categories of spending look pretty innocuous—though there is reason to be skeptical of a lot of the specific expenses. For example, the City is spending over a million dollars on retroactive hazard pay to front-facing City employees (most of them employed by Public Works) who had not qualified for hazard pay under the initial CARES Act.^{xxvi} Another \$10 million is being directed to the Department of Administration’s Housing Trust Fund, a program that “provides grants and loans for the construction, rehabilitation and accessibility modification of affordable housing for low- to moderate-income households.”^{xxvii} It’s not clear what proper role City government has in doling out this kind of assistance to *moderate*-income households, or to what degree constructing and rehabilitating housing is a smart strategy given the lessons from last century’s housing projects (like Pruitt-Igoe) that constructing housing is relatively simple—the problem is maintaining it.^{xxviii}

Examples from Around the Country

Here, we highlight a few of the ways that other parts of the country are putting their ARPA funds to good use.

Jacksonville, FL, which is America’s most populous city with a Republican mayor, has allotted most of their budgeted funds towards government operations and infrastructure: 85.0%, by Brookings’ evaluation.^{xxix} Colorado Springs, another city with a Republican at the helm, is spending a comparable 72.2% on those categories, and another 18.4% on “economic & workforce development.” Corpus Christi, TX, which has already budgeted 100% of their funding, are spending 93.9% on infrastructure, mostly on sewer and water upgrades. Thus, it seems plausible that the most responsible uses for one-time funds are spending on infrastructure and city systems; no particular out-of-the-box ideas, or even direct ways of repairing harms directly inflicted by COVID, have really emerged.

How should ARPA funds be spent locally?

Taking for granted the decision to spend roughly \$2 trillion on COVID-justified blank checks, it becomes incumbent upon state and local governments to spend their funds wisely.

Good uses for one-time funds like these generally fall into two categories: those that address backlogs of services (caused by COVID-19 or not), and those that improve systems in some

lasting way. The key, in other words, is not setting up government programs that will require ongoing funding, the way that some cities such as Minneapolis have started programs of literally mailing people \$500 every month for 2 years.^{xxx}

With that paradigm, there are promising ideas for local governments in Wisconsin, and the City of Milwaukee in particular, for how to spend ARPA money on one-time expenses that reduce backlogs and improve systems for basic government services: education, infrastructure, and addressing crime.

All of this, though, comes with one enormous caveat: the City may have too many issues making ends meet to begin with to spend second-tranche ARPA money on anything new. The City's structural deficit has been growing and, despite the City's initial (i.e. as of April) plans to earmark \$160 million of funding for lost revenue and fully funding the budget, projections for revenue and spending have suggested that that won't be enough.^{xxxi}

As reported by Urban Milwaukee, "Alderman Michael Murphy asked [budget director Nic] Kovac how much of the remaining \$112.1 million the city needs just to plug budget holes. 'The direct answer to that question would be all of it and then some,' said Kovac."^{xxxii} So, all recommendations need to be understood as ideal uses for the money, pending the City's underlying finances allowing any of it to be free for such uses.

Education

The ongoing effects of the pandemic on children's learning has been well documented. A recent WILL study found that districts like Milwaukee that remained shut down for long periods during the pandemic saw even larger drops in proficiency than other districts in the state.^{xxxiii}

Money in education is a famously slippery business. Mark Zuckerberg gained a level of fame in 2010 when he donated an eye-popping \$100 million to public education in troubled Newark, NJ. The money disappeared over the next 5 years in exchange for results that were described charitably as "limited"^{xxxiv} and less charitably as "failed."^{xxxv}

But there are some concrete ways that cities and villages across Wisconsin can spend ARPA money to power student achievement—better than, say, blowing \$20 million on consulting firms (as happened to some of Zuckerberg's money).^{xxxvi}

For one thing, the money can be used to fund educational supplies.^{xxxvii} Whether in the form of art supplies, textbooks, or additional technology that is known to improve student outcomes, some educational equipment is necessary, and directing money to defray those expenses is a useful channel (especially in an age of record inflation). A few other ideas are detailed below.

Vacant Schools

Another promising avenue: Milwaukee contains multiple vacant and unused school buildings that, despite being maintained by Milwaukee Public Schools, are owned by the City. The City has the opportunity to invest money in making a lot of these effectively abandoned buildings

habitable. They could then be rented or sold to interested educational operators. This is especially promising given Milwaukee's school choice program.^{xxxviii} high-quality schools looking to expand would have the space and facilities to do so. This would be a good use of leveraging funds to convert existing resources (that are currently liabilities) into valuable assets for the City while also allowing real investment in more neighborhoods: by allowing successful schools to expand into vacant buildings, young families will be attracted to the community and the area will benefit from their activity there.

Another directly valuable channel is to fund summer learning camps.^{xxxix} It's well-documented that students lose proficiency over the course of spending three summer months outside of school;^{xl} it's also well-documented that the transition (sometimes multiple times back and forth) to and from remote schooling has hurt children's educational growth.^{xli} Spending money to fund school over the summer to recover lost time and propel students forward would be a tremendous investment to mitigate the damage done by the (often political^{xlii}) decisions that sandbagged children's proficiency over the past couple of years. (Summer, of course, is already underway, but the ARPA money need not be *spent* until the conclusion of 2026.^{xliii})

Broadband

Lastly, the pandemic highlighted that, contrary to stereotype, access to broadband is not just a rural challenge. Reliable internet was hard to secure for many families in Milwaukee.^{xliv} So when Milwaukee Public Schools shut its doors for over a year, students and families were left scrambling. The City should leverage existing community investments, like the public library system, to invest in broadband so that schoolchildren who need access to the internet to complete homework assignments run no risk of missing out and being left behind.

Infrastructure

Milwaukee's roads are not great. Drivers will be familiar with their poor condition; the City seems chronically unable or unwilling to combat the pothole epidemic that plagues city streets. A recent Wisconsin Policy Forum study found that just 43% of the City's roads are "good" compared to 33% that are "fair" and 24% that are "poor."^{xlv} The City's roads are embedded in a 60-year replacement cycle, well above the 50-year cycle that is the standard recommendation.^{xlvi} The City should divert a large portion of its ARPA funds to accelerating repair and investing in workable, reliable infrastructure.

Fix Potholes

One specific way to spend ARPA funds is to make pothole repairs more of a genuine investment. As City Engineer Samir Amin once explained to a Common Council committee, asphalt plants (the usual choice for fixing potholes) shut down in the winter, so the City has the choice between one fill-in substance that doesn't last and another that is much more long-lasting—but prohibitively expensive.^{xlvii} So Milwaukee fills potholes with inferior material because more long-lasting options cost too much, even though that cheaper material means potholes recur sooner. Directing ARPA funds here would defray costs down the line that would be incurred when short-term material would need further repairs many times over.

One-time money may also be used to tunnel through a backlog of routine maintenance and keep roads functional. But it also hands the City the sort of extravagant means it needs to redo some of its physical setup.

“Americans, blessed with abundant land, use physical distance to create safety in many contexts,” observed the Mercatus Center’s Senior Research Fellow Salim Furth.^{xlvi} The problem with this approach is that building more land and space into roads to forgive mistakes or carelessness ultimately facilitates and incentivizes dangerous driving. It’s little wonder, therefore, that the City of Milwaukee suffers from the reckless driving that it does. Studies conducted by the City’s Department of Public Works found that “it is common for drivers to exceed the posted speed limit by at least ten miles per hour on many major streets. For example, the 85th percentile speed column of Table 11 shows that 15 percent or more of vehicles exceeded the speed limit by 10 miles per hour or more on [10 downtown streets].”^{xlix} The observations are brutal to read: “South 35th Street (data collected at 2518 South 35th Street, near West Arthur Avenue) had more than 750 vehicles per day traveling at least 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile per hour zone.” Again: “West Capitol Drive (data collected at 3839 West Capitol Drive, near North 39th Street) had more than 950 vehicles per day traveling at least 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile per hour zone.”

The reckless driving problem has been getting progressively worse, too—Mayor Johnson expressed concern over the issue in December,ⁱ and subsequently declared it a public safety crisis on his first day in office.ⁱⁱ Johnson specifically highlighted the troubling fact that “In 2021, 65 people in Milwaukee have lost their lives due to reckless driving accidents.” With this kind of buy-in and attention to the problem, we can hope to see results.⁴

Productively spending one-time funds to improve infrastructure means re-engineering roads to stop “forgiving” (incentivizing) overly fast and reckless driving. Consider the following map from the Milwaukee Police Department showing hotspots of speeding.ⁱⁱⁱ

⁴ What Mayor Johnson has released on the topic so far mostly discusses state/federal funding, vague language of “permanent improvements,” or, so far, more speed bumps.

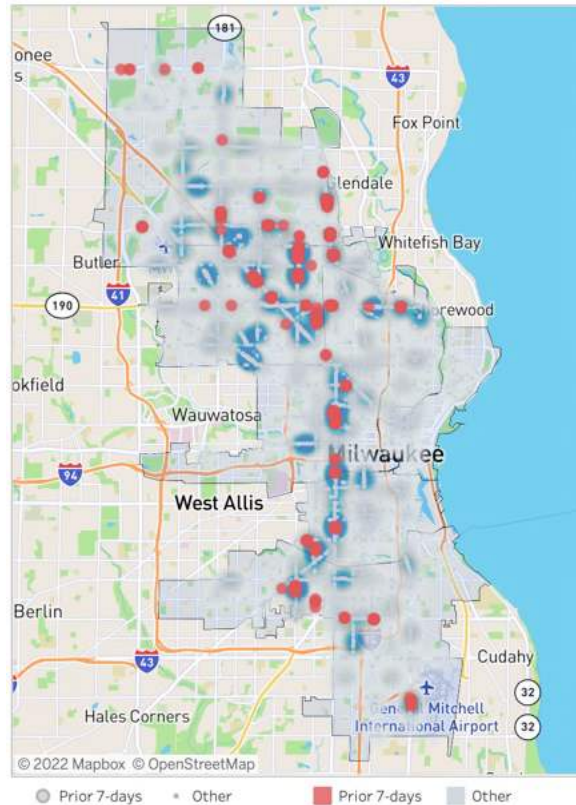


Figure 3 MPD Traffic Safety Unit Heatmap of Speeding (April 12, 2022)

It's no coincidence that the speeding problem is concentrated in corridors of long, straight roads that facilitate it.

Traffic Calming Measures

Solving this first means changing the roads. In some instances, this may include making roads narrower and less forgiving, the sort that demand the full attention of drivers as they navigate them. Narrowing streets is especially promising since it's a financially sound move for the future in its own right, since density allows for economies of scale, lowers per-capita maintenance costs, and expands a city's viable tax base. Additionally, in the context of upkeep specifically, less surface area for roads generally means less pavement that has to be upkept and maintained. And, once again, Mayor Johnson has expressed an interest in this specific angle; "We have not designed our infrastructure around people," he said recently. "It's been about moving cars as quickly as we can from one point to another point. That's not what cities are meant for. You're supposed to experience cities and walk in cities."^{liii} That said, roads should be re-constructed for these purposes in a way that prioritizes those that are already badly in need of repair—re-paving or scrapping roads that are otherwise good for 30 more years of use while many in the city are in real disrepair would be woefully inefficient.

Crime

Milwaukee has a crime problem. The FBI's Uniform Crime Report data estimate that Milwaukee's rate of violent crime is the 6th-worst of any city in America.^{liv} In 2021, Milwaukee saw a record number of homicides (an average of nearly three every day),^{lv} and is on track to see an even worse year in 2022.^{lvi} In the realm of property crime, the FBI's estimates are that Milwaukee is America's single worst city for motor vehicle thefts.^{lvii} Milwaukee's motor vehicle thefts also hit a record high in 2021, and are on track for an almost identical year thus far (2,583 vs. 2,578 as of April 18).^{lviii} These realities are reflected in public perceptions as well. A recent poll found that 75% of City of Milwaukee residents believe that the crime problem is "extremely serious" or "very serious", with only 42% reporting that they are confident in the Milwaukee Policy Department's ability to protect citizens from crime.^{lix} So how can money be spent to alleviate the crime problem?

More Cops

Hiring more cops generally reduces crime. This is a result so well-acknowledged and bipartisan that it was pushed for by Presidents Clinton and Obama and has been argued for even by left-wing *Vox*.^{lx} This seems like an attractive solution, especially since Milwaukee's police department is understaffed even by normal levels: this year's new hires fall short of the number of openings even before you factor in the "dozens" of eligible retirees.^{lxi}

The City seems reluctant to pursue this directly, though. Part of this may be the political preferences of the Common Council. Last summer, 11 of Milwaukee's 15 councilmembers voted to cut the police department's budget by 10% for 2022.^{lxii} The budget that ultimately passed cut 120 police officer positions after a successful 8-7 vote^{lxiii}—objections to the final budgeting stemming from, among other concerns, the idea that it "doesn't go far enough" cutting the police department given how, according to dissenters' accusations, it had "for decades brought . . . daily oppression in the neighborhoods we represent."^{lxiv}

But part of this may also be their issue referenced above—funding pensions. The impending fiscal cliff that Milwaukee is using ARPA funds to forestall is the result of a generous pension system that is, year over year, unsustainable and underwater. That said, Milwaukee could use ARPA money as a launching-off point for pension reform rather than hoping for state or federal bailout money down the line. Namely, the City could readjust pension promises for new hires to be realistic in the long run while expending some of its one-time use ARPA money on signing bonuses. After all, Milwaukee's many open police positions are currently in high enough demand (partly because of said long-term pension prospects) that they, unlike many other American cities, have not had to resort to offering signing bonuses to staff up, even as the day-to-day of policework has become increasingly unattractive in recent years.^{lxv} Thus, substituting some of the attractive (but fiscally irresponsible) benefits for one-time ARPA-funded signing bonuses is a good plan to revitalize the city's police force, if only City leadership has the resolve to go through with it.

Indeed, City leadership may be their own biggest obstacles in that task. It's worth pointing out that the "daily oppression" paradigm quoted above, from a joint statement by six members of the Common Council, gets the basic fact of police presence wrong. Even left-leaning research shows that higher police presence results in less crime, often because the presence of police deters

crime from being committed.^{lxvi} It's also worth noting that espousing this wrong paradigm is less a matter of what's popular with the electorate (to whom city leadership are accountable) and more a matter of inflexible ideology. After all, as Matt Yglesias writes in *Vox*, “black voters — just like white ones — support the idea of hiring more police officers . . . one primary grievance African Americans have with the criminal justice systems is that black neighborhoods are paradoxically underpoliced.”^{lxvii}

Address Backlogs

On the other end of the criminal justice equation, another channel for constructively spending the money is to work through the courts' backlog of cases. Indeed, Governor Evers recently announced the use of \$14 million of state ARPA funds to help Milwaukee County's backlog.^{lxviii} Much of that money will be directed towards hiring attorneys and support staff for a jurisdiction whose backlog is driven not just by high levels of crime but by an ongoing labor shortage.^{lxix}

One systematic change to alleviate labor pressure would be to replace court stenographers with recording equipment. Court reporting is required under state law, but there's been a “significant shortage”^{lxx} of trained stenographers. Courts currently sometimes use digital audio recorders, which rely on relatively unskilled labor compared to the skilled (and rare) professionals that court stenographers these days.^{lxxi} The practice is not immune to technological mishaps, but spending money on higher-quality recording equipment and technology, and speeding up adoption, would keep the backlog of cases from being hamstrung by this particular labor shortage in the future.

Shotspotter

There are some other good uses for the money. One idea is to expand the City's service area for ShotSpotter, a service that uses microphones to pick up gunshots and report to the police department. ShotSpotter currently covers about 11 of Milwaukee's 97 square miles, and is designed to triangulate gunshot noise and tell policemen where to address shots fired within a minute of picking up the audio, whether anyone calls in to report the sound or not.^{lxxii} This allows police to rush resources to areas of suspected gunfire. The service can be expected to yield diminishing returns, since some parts of the city suffer from that gunshot and reporting issue much more than others, but even diminished returns in this area could yield improvement.

A related measure, addressing the gap between community willingness to talk to the police and solving crime, is funding more rewards for information relating to unsolved crimes. The same sort of reluctance to come forward with information that prompted the ShotSpotter system's adoption in the first place also keeps cops from being able to solve crimes as effectively. Rewards are already sometimes used by the department^{lxxiii} (often in collaboration with the non-profit Milwaukee Crime Stoppers^{lxxiv}), but expanded funding should result in more engagement and more justice for victims of unsolved crimes.

Conclusion

For better or worse, the \$1.9 trillion of ARPA money is going to be spent. Local governments around Wisconsin have opportunities to spend this money in ways that should at least keep the list of political regrets from lengthening. This report includes some good ideas for spending that one-time money working through backlogs and improving ongoing systems for proper government roles of educating children, managing roads, and addressing crime.

Endnotes

- ⁱ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2022/06/17/milwaukee-milwaukee-county-face-new-decisions-more-arpa-funds/9864485002/>
- ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mayors_of_Milwaukee
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319>
- ^{iv} <https://smartasset.com/financial-advisor/american-rescue-plan-biden-third-stimulus> ;
<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>
- ^v <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDP#0>
- ^{vi} <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319>
- ^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CARES_Act
- ^{viii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infrastructure_Investment_and_Jobs_Act
- ^{ix} <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/Diggings/Spring-2021/Another-5.7-billion-for-Wisconsin-governments-is-insane.htm>
- ^x <https://localgovernment.extension.wisc.edu/american-rescue-plan-act-considerations-for-wisconsin-local-governments/>
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- ^{xii} <https://greenbaywi.gov/1133/ARPA-Recovery-Funding>
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- ^{xvi} <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/Diggings/Spring-2021/Another-5.7-billion-for-Wisconsin-governments-is-insane.htm>
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- xxi <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/Diggings/Spring-2021/Another-5.7-billion-for-Wisconsin-governments-is-insane.htm> One is reminded of former Democratic Governor of Nebraska Ben Nelson, who remarked before a U.S. Senate committee in 1995, “I honestly wondered . . . why I had been elected Governor of the State of Nebraska rather than just the branch manager of the State of Nebraska for the Federal Government.”
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- xxii <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2021/10/15/city-hall-council-strikes-deal-on-how-to-spend-179-million-arpa-allocation/>
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- xxiv <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Administrative-Services/Performance-Strategy-and-Budget/American-Rescue-Plan-Act/ARPA-Allocation>
- xxv <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/c98ca1423bad4160bd0f7309983b0c26>
- xxvi <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/hazard-pay.pdf>
- xxvii <https://city.milwaukee.gov/commoncouncil/HTF>
- xxviii See e.g. Howard Husock’s *The Poor Side of Town*.
- xxix <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/arpa-investment-tracker/>
- xxx <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/basic-income/> For an example of anticipated ongoing costs derailing an actual government service, see the fate of Wisconsin’s Talgo trains:
<https://www.wpr.org/derailed/years-after-rail-saga-wisconsins-talgo-trains-sit-idle>
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- xxxiv <https://cepr.harvard.edu/news/usa-today-what-did-zuckerbergs-100-million-buy-newark-bit-progress>
- xxxv <https://www.businessinsider.com/mark-zuckerberg-schools-education-newark-mayor-ras-baraka-cory-booker-2018-5>
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- xxxvii <https://www.ocpathink.org/post/how-oklahoma-should-spend-its-cares-k-12-funding>
- xxxviii The first in the country, incidentally: <https://sfs.dpi.wi.gov/SFSdw/CompRevReport.aspx>
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- xl <https://www.brookings.edu/research/summer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/>
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xlvi https://wispolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PickingUpThePieces_Full.pdf

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liii <https://mpdtsu.org/tsustatistics/>

liiii <https://twitter.com/IsaacRowlett/status/1536535611372359682?s=20&t=BSBm1ACGpQPh3-dA9AXXvg>

liv This was Milwaukee's rating in both 2019 and 2020. 2021 data are incomplete (roughly 50% of jurisdictions have reported to the FBI as of this writing) but show Milwaukee in 5th. <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/#>
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lvi <https://city.milwaukee.gov/police/Information-Services/Crime-Maps-and-Statistics>

lvii These are 2021 data, which are incomplete but which show Milwaukee with a commanding lead over the high-water marks from recent years and which show Milwaukee in particular outstripping the motor vehicle theft rate capitals of 2019 and 2020, Albuquerque and Chattanooga. <https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/#>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_cities_by_crime_rate

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- lxxiii <https://www.cbs58.com/news/milwaukee-crime-stoppers-offers-10-000-rewards-for-information-on-homicides-of-jenny-her-and-krystal-tucker>
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