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When Climate Funds Pay for Highway Expansion.

Several US states are tapping a federal carbon reduction program to fund highway projects, arguing that adding vehicle lanes can bring emissions down.

Every month, Dennis Grzenzski drives the stretch of Interstate 43 that runs north of Milwaukee to a board meeting for the Blue Heron Wildlife Sanctuary. Along the route, the urban landscape gives way to undeveloped farmland. Traffic is usually pretty light. But the view on his drive changed in February 2022, when construction crews began work to expand the roadway from four to six lanes.

“By no stretch of the imagination was that a place that really needed more lanes because of congestion,” said Grzenzski, an environmental attorney who has fought the state on highway expansions — though not this specific project — for close to 30 years.

The Wisconsin interstate expansion represents one example of concerns raised by transportation and environmental advocacy groups around how states are spending funds from a federal program designed to lower carbon emissions. In 2023, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation used \$4.1 million of its annual \$24 million allotment from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act’s Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) to fund work in the I-43 project, including energy-efficient lighting and signal technology.

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