



Excellence in Highway Design Awards - 2026 **Awards Overview and Nomination Requirements**

This document explains the details of WisDOT's annual design awards.
Please consider participating!

1. Awards Granted

Seven awards will be presented. Each region is encouraged to submit one nomination in each category. One award will be given in each of the following categories:

Best Structure - WisDOT	Best Structure - Consultant/Municipality
Best Urban Project - WisDOT	Best Urban Project - Consultant/Municipality
Best Rural Project - WisDOT	Best Rural Project - Consultant/Municipality
Best Local Program Project	

2. Candidate Projects

Only projects **constructed** in the previous two calendar years may be nominated; construction should be substantially complete. Projects may be nominated by WisDOT Regions, the Local Program, consulting firms or a municipality. A candidate project may be nominated only once and only in one category.

3. Prescreening and Nomination Process

Nominations are determined in two steps:

1. First, interested designers notify their region Project Development managers (or their designee), who determine which projects to submit for final nomination. It is the Region's responsibility to decide which project to submit for each category on behalf of that region.
Note: for structures nominations, please coordinate with Bureau of Structures (on which projects to choose, who will prepare which portions of the nomination, etc.)
Region decisions for nominees are **due by Friday, November 21, 2025.**
2. Second, each region submits one nomination in each category to the Central Office Design Awards Committee.
Nominations are due at the Central Office by **Friday, December 19, 2025.**

4. Summary Schedule

Oct 17, 2025	Call for Nominations
Nov 21, 2025 (Fri)	Nominees Determined by Regions WisDOT Regional Office notifies designers, consultants and municipalities of projects to move forward in nomination process. Notify Dan Tyler of selections.
Dec 19, 2025 (Fri)	Nominations due from Regions to Central Office
Jan 23, 2026 (Fri)	Winners notified by this date
Mar 10, 2026 (Tue)	Awards Ceremony

5. Nomination - submittal requirements

The nomination is the material sent to Central Office for judging. Award winners will be selected by a judging committee, including representatives from Federal Highway Administration, Region Offices, Bureau of Project Development and private-sector design firms. Judging will be based **solely on nomination materials submitted**. Project overviews, before-and-after photos, maps, and/or limited select plan sheets are encouraged.

Include the following information in each nomination:

- A. **“Sound Byte”** In 50 words or less, summarize: *why should this project win a design award?*
- B. **Project Data** - required at the beginning of each nomination:
 - Category and region for which project is being nominated
 - Design ID and Construction ID’s (include all)
 - Project name, Road/Facility
 - Municipality, County
 - Dates of PS&E, letting, and construction completion
 - Name of organization submitting
 - Contact person for award-related materials (Name, email, phone, address)
 - Project personnel and their roles, including significant players from region, bureaus, agencies, consultants, etc.
- C. **Award Ceremony Information** - to be used in the awards presentation if selected
 - Person(s) accepting award at ceremony (name, email, phone)
 - Names to show on certificate, up to 6 persons and their companies and/or roles
 - One JPG image to be used on certificate

D. **Executive Summary** - Overall purpose, goals, and design methodology

E. **Location Map(s)** - At least one high-level location map

F. **Judging Criteria** - Address the criteria listed on page 4 or 5, below.

G. **Photographs**

- 3-10 digital photos (.JPG format) suitable for large-screen display. Before-and-after photos are encouraged. 7 MB max. per photo.
- Focus on **design** elements and the finished product rather than construction progress.
- Photos may be included in the nomination PDF, but additional, separate .JPG files are required as well (the images may be the same).
- Note: Photo release. Photos submitted may be used by the Department and its agents, in whole or in part, in any media, for any use, re-use or publication. The submitting entity waives its rights to inspect or approve finished products using the photos, and releases, discharges, and agrees to hold harmless the Department and its agents from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form, whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the use of such photographic or video images or in any subsequent processing of them, as well as any publication of them, including without limitation any claims for libel or violation of any right of publicity or privacy.

Nominations are due to the Central Office by Friday, December 19th, 2025.

The Design Awards use an electronic-only nomination submittal:

- Email **one single PDF** of the complete nomination to Dan Tyler at daniel.tyler@dot.wi.gov
- Format the PDF to include only 8.5"x11" and/or 11"x17" sheets
- Prepare the PDF to be printer-ready with one click
- 15 pages maximum and 10 MB maximum PDF file size
- 5,000 word maximum
- Send **separate** JPG files of the photos, with conspicuous file names, in the same or additional email(s); these will be used to create the presentation materials.
- Files may be transmitted via link to Box or FTP folder

Thank you for participating in the 2026 Design Awards! If you have questions, please contact Dan Tyler at (608) 267-7945 or daniel.tyler@dot.wi.gov. We look forward to receiving your nominations!

Dan Tyler, P.E.
Chair, Design Awards

Bill Strobel, P.E.
Chief, BPD Design Standards and Oversight Section

Excellence in Highway Design Awards - 2026
Judging Criteria – for **Rural, Urban, and Local Program** nominations

1. Design process & Innovation

- a. What were the significant design elements? These could include portions of the project that were studied or optimized, or alternatives considered to solve various problems. These can include low-cost / high-value modifications. (*Or: what were those parts of the design that made this project interesting?*)
- b. Note any specific safety problems this project addresses, and how. How does the design balance safety improvements with impacts and the Department's resource use?
- c. Does this project improve mobility choices for people traveling by transit, bicycle, or on foot, and if so, how?
- d. Note any innovative, new, nonstandard, or unusual design, technology or products used.

2. Context, Cost-effective design & Efficiencies

- a. What design decisions were based not only on standards but on the project's context? What notable constraints or controls influenced this design?
- b. What design elements reduced costs, improved efficiency, or added value? Explain these in terms of construction costs, costs to the public, and/or costs to society.
- c. What design features will help minimize ongoing maintenance effort and/or cost?

3. Impacts to the public

- a. How did designers involve local stakeholders to add lasting value to the community, the environment, and the transportation system?
- b. Explain any efforts to preserve or enhance natural areas, cultural resources, or historic or archeological resources.
- c. Explain the traffic control / staging scheme, how it was determined, and how impacts to the local and traveling public were mitigated. Discuss any coordination during design that improved the construction process.

4. Design document quality

- a. What was the final construction cost (excluding E&C)?
- b. What was the total design cost? (as \$ and % of total)
- c. How many bid items did the project have and how many items had a final quantity within 2% of the let quantity? (as a number and a % of total items)
- d. How many change orders were issued, and in what amount? Briefly list them and explain why each was necessary, noting whether they were related to the design.
- e. How many addenda were issued prior to letting? Briefly list them and explain why each was necessary.
- f. How many bids were received?
- g. What was the final engineer's estimate prior to letting?
- h. What were the three low bids? List the bids, the spread (\$ and %) between each, and the difference between the low and third-low bid as a percentage of the estimate.

Excellence in Highway Design Awards - 2026
Judging Criteria – for **Structures** nominations

Note: while overall information is necessary in the nomination, the structures category will be judged with a focus on the *structure* itself. Please contact WisDOT Bureau of Structures before beginning any nomination.

1. Design process & Innovation

- a. What structure alternatives were considered? Explain them in relation to the existing facility, and note how the preferred structure alternative was selected.
- b. Note any innovative, new, nonstandard, or unusual structure technology, products, or design techniques (e.g., finite element modeling, etc.) used.
- c. Note any structural complexities or innovations, or unusual project constraints.

2. Cost-effective design & Efficiencies

- a. What structure design decisions were based not only standards but also on context? What notable controls or constraints governed this design?
- b. What structure design elements reduced costs, improved efficiency, or added value? Explain these in terms of design costs, construction costs, costs to the public, and/or costs to society.
- c. What structure design features will help minimize ongoing maintenance?

3. Impacts to the public

- a. How did designers involve local stakeholders to add lasting value to the community, the environment, and the transportation system?
- b. Explain any efforts to preserve or enhance natural areas, cultural resources, or historic or archeological resources in and around the area of the structure.
- c. Explain any staging or coordination efforts related to the structure design that improved the construction process or reduced impacts to the public.

4. Design document quality

- a. What was the final structure construction cost (excluding E&C, using structure plan bid items)? Also note the entire project cost.
- b. What was the engineer's estimate for the structure (using structure plan bid items)?
- c. What was the total structure design cost? (as \$ and % of total structure construction)
- d. How many change orders and/or post-let revisions were issued, and in what amount? List structure-related change orders and briefly explain why any revision related to structure design was necessary.
- e. How many addenda were issued prior to letting? List structure-related addenda and briefly explain why each was necessary.