

Milwaukee streetcar contractor expects to begin laying tracks in April

By: Alex Zank, alex.zank@dailyreporter.com February 17, 2017 1:06 pm



Kiewit Corp., the contractor overseeing the Milwaukee streetcar project, expects the first rail pieces to arrive in late March and be installed in April. (Rendering courtesy of www.milwaukeestreetcar.com)

It felt a lot like spring on Friday — and not just because of the unseasonably warm weather.

Officials behind the \$124 million streetcar project in downtown Milwaukee said they will be ready to start laying down track in just a couple of months.

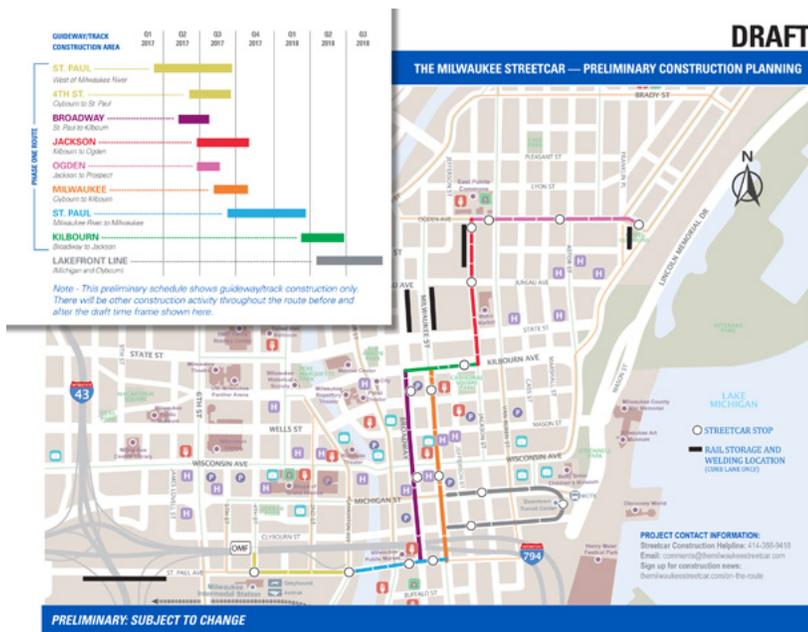
Mike Ethier, a project manager at Kiewit Corp., the Omaha, Neb.-based contractor overseeing the project, said on Friday that they expect the rail pieces that will eventually make up the streetcar's tracks to arrive in late March. The tracks will then begin to be installed in April, first along part of St. Paul Avenue.

Although work technically started on the project last year, with the relocation of utility equipment out of the streetcar's path, the public has so far seen little that is indicative of the shape the streetcar will eventually take.

The project is to start with a 2.1-mile downtown route and 0.4-mile line leading to the city's lakefront. Officials also have discussed the possibility of having extensions to various city neighborhoods.

Before the announcement at Milwaukee's City Hall on Friday, Ethier told members of the city's Joint Committee on Downtown Streetcar Implementation that the streetcar project will have three primary construction phases.

First is major preparatory work, including the utility relocations that have already occurred. Other work in this phase includes the installation of pole foundations for an overhead catenary system, which will supply power to the streetcar.



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All 474 of the 80-foot pieces of steel track needed for the project are scheduled for delivery in March. The material will be stored at sites throughout the city.

“We’ve been working with (the Department of Public Works) and their team to find places that are optimal to do this,” Ethier said.

The rail pieces will be welded together to make longer sections of track, some of them stretching for as many as 320 feet. Ethier said the goal here is to ensure passengers will enjoy a smooth ride.

Work on the guideway itself is to be part of the project’s second major phase.

“To do that, we come up through the road, and depending on where we are, make an 8-foot-wide guideway construction slot,” Ethier said, adding that this work will have crews cutting only about two feet into the ground.

After the streetcar rail is finished and properly aligned, crews will pour concrete and perform some street restoration.

Track will then be installed at different parts of the street throughout the year. Ethier said his team took into account scheduled festivals and input from area businesses when they were putting the construction schedule together.

The project’s third phase involves system installation and roadway-finishing work. This includes installing overhead wire, testing the tracks and reopening previously closed-off street sections to traffic.

“This will be ongoing well into 2018 along the main line,” Ethier said.

Work on the downtown loop is expected to finish sometime in the second quarter of 2018. This is also roughly when construction will start on the lakefront line. That work, which involves laying track along Michigan and Clybourn streets, is expected to finish by the end of the third quarter of 2018.

City officials also issued a request for proposals on Friday seeking a company to operate the streetcar once the line itself is built. Ghassan Korban, commissioner of Milwaukee’s Department of Public Works, said the city wants to name an operator at least a year before the streetcar is expected to be up and running.

“The industry standard is to make sure we have an operator on board for a year or more before we are in actual revenue operations,” Korban said on Friday. “So we’re on track for that, (and) we’re very excited about that development.”

