

## Milwaukee to tap streetcar contractors as early as winter

By: Dan Shaw, dan.shaw@dailyreporter.com August 14, 2015 2:36 pm

Milwaukee officials will be ready to select a general contractor for the construction of a streetcar line in the downtown as early as late winter or next spring.

Tim Clancy, vice president of the construction consulting company The Concord Group, said at a meeting Friday of the city's Joint Committee on Downtown Streetcar Implementation that the streetcar project is proceeding ahead of schedule. Among the recent significant developments, he said, was the receipt of federal approval for moving one part of the streetcar's route up a block.

Rather than use East Wells Street to go east and west between North Broadway and North Van Buren streets, cars will now travel one block north along Kilbourn Avenue. Also, a rail line that was to convey cars on North Van Buren Street between Wells and Ogden streets will instead be shifted one block to the west, to North Jackson Street, where cars will run north and south on separate lines.

"This is another major milestone," said Clancy, who is advising the city on the streetcar project.

The street changes were approved in a [letter the Federal Transit Administration sent to Milwaukee officials](#) on Tuesday. The route was moved, in part, to avoid encroaching on as much existing utility equipment as possible.

The change in plans is expected to reduce the cost of the project by at least \$1 million. The city, for the time being at least, is responsible for paying to move power lines and similar equipment out of the streetcar's path.

Standard practice is instead usually to have utility companies themselves pay for those sorts of relocations. But state legislators, in 2013, passed a law that put Milwaukee on the hook for any utility costs stemming specifically from the streetcar project.

The law came in response to complaints made by We Energies customers who do not live in or frequently visit Milwaukee. Those customers argued that the utility rates that they pay should not be spent on accommodating a streetcar that they would probably almost never ride.

City officials are now challenging that law in court. To allow the project to proceed while the dispute awaits resolution, Milwaukee is paying for utility work out of the \$123.9 million budget the city's Common Council approved for the streetcar project in February.

Should the city eventually prevail in the legal battle, We Energies would have to reimburse taxpayers for the cost of moving utility equipment. Clancy said city officials recently reached an agreement that will allow We Energies to move ahead with planning the relocations.

If the company goes beyond moving the equipment, and instead makes improvements, it will have to bear the difference in cost.

Another adviser working on the streetcar project, Ashley Booth, planning and technical services director at the engineering firm HNTB, said the agreement with We Energies will serve as the template for similar deals that will have to be struck with other utility companies whose equipment will also have to be moved.

"There are a dozen to 15 other utilities," Booth said. "We Energies is the largest player in town. But we have a lot of people we need to move forward with now."

Meanwhile, Clancy said Milwaukee officials are moving closer to buying the actual streetcars that will travel the designated route, which is now planned to be 2.1 miles in length but could eventually include a 0.4-mile extension leading to the lakefront. Streetcar sellers are expected to submit their "best and final offers" to the city by Monday

and then negotiations will continue over the next several weeks.

He said various modifications could be made to the cars or the terms of purchase in order to lower the cost. A particular seller, for instance, might be given several additional months to deliver the final products, or the specifications might be changed to allow the city to buy already built cars rather than have new ones made.

Clancy said the plan is to have a streetcar builder selected by the end of September. The construction of the first

phase of the Milwaukee streetcar is expected to end in spring 2018.



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