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Streetcar rerouted near Cathedral Square Park, upgraded stop planned on Kilbourn

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Sean Ryan

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Milwaukee will change its streetcar track route around Cathedral Square Park in the hope of saving at least \$1 million in utility relocation costs.

The new track alignment was among updates provided to city officials during a Friday morning meeting. The city is designing the downtown streetcar loop and still aims to start construction of the track in spring 2016 for service to start in summer 2018.

The streetcar originally was designed to run south of Cathedral Square on East Wells Street, and then to jog north along North Van Buren Street. However, officials discovered a high volume of underground utilities, many owned by We Energies, below Wells Street, prompting the route shift. The city in 2013 and 2014 changed a northbound track of the streetcar from North Broadway to North Milwaukee Street to cut utility costs.

The new alignment would put the streetcar on East Kilbourn Avenue, north of the park. The northbound track, instead of running on Van Buren, would run on Jackson Street a block to the west. The southbound track in that area will remain on Jackson Street.

The savings on utility costs won't be nailed down for another four weeks because the city must coordinate with We Energies. However, it is expected to be "significant," and at least \$1 million, said Milwaukee Department of Public Works commissioner Ghassan Korban.



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The new streetcar route would run along East Kilbourn, which is closed to traffic during... more

The shift to Kilbourn Avenue also creates the opportunity for an upgraded streetcar stop near Cathedral Square, Korban said. Planners contemplate a stop in the median on Kilbourn that could serve both east- and westbound streetcars. Details for that stop are being considered, but the goal is to “elevate the design,” Korban said.

“We thought we would create something a little more special,” he said.

The route shift has been considered for months. Earlier discussions raised the prospect of the impact for Jazz in the Park and Bastille Days, events in the park that close Kilbourn Avenue to traffic. City officials continue to coordinate with the East Town Association, which organizes the events, to work out those logistics.

The Federal Transit Administration must review the route change. An application to the FTA will be filed by early next week, said Tim Clancy, of The Concord Group, the city’s owners representative and top consultant on the project. Approval for the route change is expected by mid-July, he said.

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