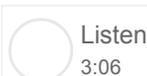


Politics & Government

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Milwaukee Leaders At Odds Over Proposed Streetcar Project

By [LATOYA DENNIS](#) (@PEOPLE/LATOYA-DENNIS)



UPDATE: Milwaukee Common Council votes to delay final vote on streetcar proposal until February 10, to allow a petition drive to continue.



The blueprint calls for four miles of track. It would loop the lower east side and the Third Ward, with stops downtown and at the Intermodal Station. The estimated cost of the project is \$124 million. Federal money would cover 45 percent; special financing districts would provide the rest. The proposal has both supporters and detractors on the Council and in the business community.

Alderman Bob Bauman called on Milwaukee to act, saying the city received a millions of federal dollars more than two decades ago to build a downtown streetcar, but leaders have not moved.

“We have lost the purchasing power of \$289 million in 1991 dollars. We’ve just wasted that money, by indecision, by constant argument, by is the benefit enough, is the payoff big enough? And in the meantime, other cities just plow ahead,” Bauman says.

<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wuwm/files/2014/newmap-b.gif>

Milwaukee leaders at odds over whether spending \$124 million on a streetcar is a good idea
Credit Milwaukee Streetcar

According to Bauman, Milwaukee can afford the proposal on the table. He says besides, Wisconsin’s largest company – Johnson Controls, says it may move its headquarters downtown if the city approves the streetcar.

“Potentially a 50 story building, 1.2 million square feet, probably 2,000-3,000 employees, where they want to see the growth in their corporate headquarters take place. That’s economic development. That benefits the entire city through the increased tax base, which then is available for us to afford the services on the north side, the west side, the northwest side, the southwest side. That’s how the city pays for the things our citizens expect from us,” Bauman says.

Johnson Controls might not be the only company a streetcar would attract, according to Matt Dorner. He’s economic development director for the Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District.

“Transit continues to be looked at as one of those sort of criteria if someone’s making a decision about where they want to live or if they’re going to move somewhere. One of the main components is a well-connected transit system,” Dorner says.

Yet some business groups – such as the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, have not taken a position in the streetcar debate. It notes that its members are divided.

Some people are opposed, including Alderman Tony Zielinski. He says the project would not reach areas of the city in desperate need of development.

“The thing that especially causes concern for me as we have the highest, if not one of the highest African American unemployment rates in the entire country. And where do we stick this investment that according to our opponents is going to spur development not in the central city, instead downtown instead of providing it for the neediest people,” Zielinski says.

Zielinski adds, that downtown is already in the midst of a building boom.

Another opponent of the streetcar is Mike Crivello – president of the Milwaukee Police Association. He questions how the city can afford a rail project, when it continues tightening its belt when it comes to services.

“I’m afraid for our officers who so often have to ride one man, who so often are furloughed, for our officers that are working in an understaffed police force of which seems to be shrinking year after year. Now my challenge to the city was if you’re going to continue to furlough our officers, how are you going to build a streetcar?” Crivello says.

The approved a procedural move Wednesday, to delay a decision until February 10. Several aldermen are attempting to collect enough signatures to force voters to weigh-in, on a referendum.

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