

"Ripple effect of business:" Milwaukee's streetcar project moves forward, stimulates interest in city

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MILWAUKEE -- The Milwaukee streetcar has been a controversial topic from the beginning. On Thursday, June 16th, the Milwaukee Press Club went behind the headlines to hear from the source about where the project stands.

The panel discussion included the city engineer, the Planning and Tech Services director and the Downtown Business Improvement District's CEO, who said the Milwaukee streetcar project is really happening -- and it is going to be more than just a mode of transportation.



"It is really about the connections that start in this nucleus of downtown Milwaukee and have far reaches into our entire region," said Beth Weirick, CEO of the Downtown Business Improvement District.



There is already a plan to expand that connection -- which would allow the streetcar to travel north from the Milwaukee Intermodal Station along 4th St. and end up at the new arena site. 50 acres of underutilized land and 85 properties are within a quarter mile of that expansion.



Weirick said there are already inquiries about potential business development.

"People know that we are a hot place to be right now -- and it's expanded far beyond the boundaries of Milwaukee developers. And God knows, I love our Milwaukee developers, but what it's created is this ripple effect of interest," Weirick said.

The panel was also excited to announce construction of the actual streetcars will begin soon. That includes the off-wire vehicle that is being added to the fleet.



"What that means is the vehicle will be equipped with lithium-ion batteries and it will enable us to reduce some cost related to our catenary system that powers the vehicles," said Ashley Booth, Planning and Tech Services Director for HNTB.



Organizers of the streetcar project recently applied for another federal grant worth \$20 million for the 4th St. extension. If they are successful at securing that grant and a \$20 million match from the city, the \$40 million streetcar extension along 4th St. could open for service in 2020.

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