

Milwaukee County

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Jim Stingl | In My Opinion

E-mail

Streetcar prompts IAQs — infrequently asked questions



Rinka Chung Architecture Inc.

A streetcar stop is part of the design of the 44-story Couture apartment tower proposed for downtown Milwaukee's lakefront.

Jan. 31, 2015

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For some reason, I haven't given much thought to the Milwaukee streetcar.

I think it's because I came to assume we'd never actually get to ride this thing. It was simply something we argue about year after year. Like whether the BMO Harris Bradley Center is worn out.

Now it's getting serious. On Feb. 10, the Common Council is expected to give final approval to the streetcar project's starter route linking the Intermodal Station, east downtown, the Third Ward, the lakefront and the lower east side.

Groundbreaking, more accurately pavement cracking, is on track — streetcar pun intended — for later this year.

Here is a list of IAQs — infrequently asked questions — about the streetcar.

What are we calling this thing? Looks like we're keeping it pretty literal with The Milwaukee Streetcar, rather than something like A Great Streetcar on a Great Lake, or perhaps Look, the Wires Over the Streets Are Back. Other cities have done the same — Portland Streetcar, Seattle Streetcar, Cincinnati Streetcar — though some are flashier, like the River Rail in Little Rock and Sun Link in Tucson.

I hear it costs \$124 million. That could buy a lot of extra freeway lanes. Where are we going to come up with that kind of money? As Aaron Rodgers would say, relax. The money is coming from a \$54.9 million federal transit grant, plus many millions more in TID funds, another word for taxes that don't hurt much. Maybe we can get NBA players to toss some more jock taxes our way, too.

I'll bet opponents are making a lot of reasoned arguments against the streetcar, right? Well, they have a [Facebook page](#) with a profile photo of a train that's on fire. So there's that. And one alderman said, based on nothing at all, we can expect "maybe a rape" on the streetcar. They look at underfilled buses and those quaint trolleys and say not enough people will ride the streetcars, which may prove to be true. Plus, they don't like the mayor or anything he stands for, or liberals and their hippie mass transit.

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- My Community Now and Lake Country Now websites switch to Viafoura commenting | 3:15 p.m.
- Former Minneapolis mayor lauds Milwaukee's progress, urges more | 3:11 p.m.
- Justice Ann Walsh Bradley raised \$110,000 for campaign in January | 3:02 p.m.
- Milwaukee business leaders again rally support for streetcar | 2:50 p.m.
- Aquarius Technologies names new president, CEO | 2:44 p.m.
- Walker to spend \$8.1 million to repay HUD grant under Burke | 2:44 p.m.
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I also heard streetcars will spread the measles here. Can we take that chance? Not true, though it would be the perfect TV news scare story. Unless we go TID crazy and install a line to Disneyland, we should be OK. Just to be on the safe side, wash your hands when you reach your destination.

Isn't it strange that Milwaukee's future prosperity relies on a 19th century contraption that we scrapped in the 1950s? The new streetcar does have a back-to-the-future feel about it. But it turns out that millennials have something in common with our ancestors. They're not as crazy about owning cars, and they favor convenient mass transit, or at least the right kind of mass transit. As my 25-year-old daughter puts it: "We like trains. We hate buses."

Won't these streetcars invite manspreading? You know, men who spread their legs wide and take up too much room on the New York subways. Manspreading is a big issue out there, and probably the next word vying for inclusion in the dictionary. I think we'll be OK. If it gets to be a problem here, we can handle it the way women are doing in New York. By taking photos of the clueless guys and posting them on social media.

The streetcar feels like a frill to me, something we want but don't really need. True? Milwaukee needs this chance to be even more intermodally. Don't we deserve an occasional improvement around here that's not a freeway interchange or place to watch sports? Our desire is named streetcar, and we crave, in the words of the [official streetcar website](#), "attractive short-trip urban circulation."

Sounds like you're getting behind the streetcar. Yes, I suppose I am. Though I'm not as excited to literally get behind the streetcar in my car. Those 60-footers look slow. If they don't play nice in traffic, we may see some streetcar rage as we try to get around them. Look, the Jetsons promised we'd have jetpacks by now. In the meantime, the streetcar will help us travel in early 20th century style.

Call Jim Stingl at (414) 224-2017 or email at jstingl@jrn.com

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