



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: February 21, 2014
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Transportation Committee
RE: Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study

At the Friday, January 24, 2014 public hearing at the Saint Paul Planning Commission, a total of 13 individuals testified on the Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study. Eight individuals were opposed to the idea of constructing streetcars in Saint Paul; one was in full support; and the remaining four individuals stated neither support nor opposition to the construction of streetcars, but had questions, concerns, or other comments to register on the study or the neighborhoods through which streetcars were studied.

In addition to the testimony offered at the hearing, 229 comments were received via Open Saint Paul (at stpaul.gov/open) regarding the Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study, in response to three separate forum topics:

What do you think about bringing streetcars back to Saint Paul? Would you like to see them in your neighborhood? Why or why not?

82 comments were registered: 64% were in favor of streetcars, 26% were opposed to streetcars, and 10% stated neither support nor opposition

Which of the seven proposed lines do you believe should be the City of Saint Paul's first priority, and why?

103 comments were registered: 18% believed that none of the proposed corridors should be the first streetcar line, 40% chose West 7th or East 7th as their priority corridor, and 42% chose one of the other five corridors as their priority corridor

If you are unable to attend one of the community open houses for the Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study, please provide your comments here.

44 comments were registered: 34% were in favor of streetcars, 52% were opposed to streetcars, and 14% stated neither support nor opposition.

The Planning Commission received 39 written comments from four open houses, held in August 2013 and January 2014: 41% were in favor of streetcars, 41% were opposed to streetcars, and 18% stated neither support nor opposition.

Finally, 10 letters and emails were received in response to the Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study. Two were in favor of streetcars, 6 were in opposition to streetcars, and 2 stated neither support nor opposition.

Below is a summary of the main arguments offered in support of and in opposition to streetcar service for Saint Paul.

Testimony in support:

Common themes of the testimony offered at the public hearing and other comments received in support of streetcars were:

- Need for **improved transit service** in Saint Paul.
 - Decline in desire for, and cost-effectiveness of, personal vehicles in the future.
 - Streetcars are more comfortable and convenient than buses.
 - Rail transit is more reliable than buses are.
- Potential for streetcars to **attract private development and businesses** to the neighborhoods they might run through.
- Streetcars will attract new people to the base of transit riders, and are appealing to both **millennials and retirees** who want to live in cities.
 - Streetcars will help with traffic congestion in the city by getting people out of their cars.
 - Fewer cars in the road will reduce maintenance costs of the roadways.
 - Streetcars can help add to a sense of community and a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Improved **fuel efficiency and other environmental benefits** from streetcars, both due to the decrease in cars on the road, and because of the ability for an electricity-based transit system to eventually take advantage of more sustainable power sources.
- **Cost efficiencies** because of longevity of equipment and higher capacities for streetcars over buses.

Testimony in opposition:

Common themes of the testimony offered at the public hearing and other comments received in opposition to streetcars were:

- High **capital and operating costs** associated with streetcar service. [This is overwhelmingly the biggest reason why people were opposed to streetcar service for Saint Paul.]
 - Buses do the same thing and cheaper.
 - Taxes, and in particular property taxes, are too high and should not be used for streetcars.
 - The money could be spent on other things, from police to roadway improvements.
 - Subsidies paying for the transit we already have are already too high. Transit should make the City money.
- Potential **construction-related disruptions to businesses** along streets where streetcar lines might be built.
 - The LRT has destroyed University Avenue and streetcars will have similar effects on other streets in Saint Paul.
- Disruption to **views and the streetscape** due to the overhead wire power system.
- **Buses are better than streetcars** because they are more flexible in their routing.
 - The existing bus system isn't well used, as evidenced by half-empty buses.
 - People don't ride buses because they feel unsafe, which could easily be fixed.

Testimony neither in support nor in opposition:

There were quite a number of people who offered comments and testimony who did not take a stance on streetcars, but expressed interest in streetcars with questions about their operations and costs. Common themes of this testimony and these comments were:

- High **capital and operating costs** associated with streetcar service: desire to see a **comparison to bus improvements** which were thought to have the potential to bring similar benefits to Saint Paul with fewer costs.
- **Different network connections** for streetcars from what is included in the proposed long-term network, including connections to Como Park, or routes that loop through neighborhoods without stopping in Downtown.
- How will **significant snow events impact** the operations of streetcars and of the other vehicles and uses of the street?
- How will streetcars operate as part of the **larger regional transit network** including the results of other transit studies? How will they connect with the existing LRT and bus system?

Testimony specific to lines in different neighborhoods:

There was significant testimony and public comment on specific streets or communities. One of the Open Saint Paul questions posted during this study asked: *Which of the seven proposed lines do you believe should be the City of Saint Paul's first priority, and why?* 103 participants posted responses. The results from this question broke down as follows:

- 29% believed that **West 7th Street** should be the first streetcar line.
- 18% believed that **none** of the listed corridors should be the first streetcar line.
- 13% believed that **Selby Avenue** should be the first streetcar line.
- 12% believed that **Grand Avenue** should be the first streetcar line.
- 11% believed that **East 7th Street** should be the first streetcar line.
- 9% believed that **Rice Street** should be the first streetcar line.
- 5% believed that **Robert Street** should be the first streetcar line.
- 3% believed that **Payne Avenue** should be the first streetcar line.

A letter submitted by the Grand Avenue Business Association showed the results of a poll taken of their member organizations. 75% of those polled were opposed to streetcars on Grand Avenue, and 64% were opposed to streetcars in general.

A letter submitted by Minnesota Public Radio urged the City to avoid a route on West 7th Street in front of their facilities.

Summary:

The testimony received regarding streetcars in Saint Paul was extremely varied, and included comments that were passionate on both the pro- and con- sides of this topic. The most frequent comments in support of building streetcars in Saint Paul were for the benefits of both an improved transit system, and for strengthening economic development in the city. The most common comment opposing streetcars was that they are an expensive investment, both in the capital and the operating costs. The most frequent question was whether or not buses would be able to achieve the same objectives as those stated for streetcars, but at a lower price.

The goals of the Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study were to determine whether streetcars would be feasible in Saint Paul, to determine where they would work the best to achieve both improved transit connectivity and increased economic development activity, and to identify a good starting line for the City. The consulting team determined that streetcars would be feasible in this operating environment, that streetcars would help achieve the stated objectives (of transit connectivity improvement and economic development) on seven routes through Saint Paul, and that the line with most potential to realize those objectives is on East and West 7th Street. This public participation process showed that though there is a strong base of support for streetcar development in Saint Paul, many residents and business owners have concerns about the high cost of this investment.

Transportation Committee Recommendation:

The Transportation Committee has served as the steering committee for the Streetcar Feasibility Study, and has reviewed the study on the following occasions:

October 29, 2012	Streetcars 101 and Evaluation Criteria
November 4, 2012	Evaluation Criteria
February 11, 2013	Phase 1 Screening
May 20, 2013	Phase 2 Evaluation: process update
July 29, 2013	Phase 2 Evaluation: Long-Term Network
November 18, 2013	Phase 3 Summary: Starter Line Proposal
February 10, 2014	Review of Public Comment and Recommendation to the Planning Commission

The Transportation Committee recommends to the Planning Commission two separate items:

- Approval of the long-term network of feasible streetcar routes for Saint Paul, including 7 lines: East 7th, Grand, Payne, Rice, Robert, Selby, and West 7th; and
- Authorization for staff to proceed to a more detailed analysis of the Starter Line corridor, *comparing the potential benefits of streetcars to enhanced bus service*, specifically for East-West 7th Street from Arcade to Randolph, with the purpose and intent to:
 - Improve transit connectivity;
 - Enhance the attractiveness of transit service; and
 - Catalyze development through transit investment.

This next study will include (among other elements) an examination and recommendation for routing through Downtown Saint Paul; a more detailed analysis of capital, operating, and lifecycle costs; and an economic development potential breakdown, including a close study of the impacts of modern streetcar lines in other cities in the United States.