

Dear Madame President, Council Members and Michelle,

I would like to testify tonight at the public hearing for streetcars. Here is a written copy of my testimony.

My name is Jennifer Mason and I live at 604 Bates Ave. here in St. Paul. My husband, our 2 children and I live just off of East 7th Street. We are excited to see all of the new development that has been happening in our lovely city with the revitalization of Lowertown, the build-up of businesses along University and other various projects. It is thrilling to be able to look to the future and see the investments that are being made for younger generations and generations that haven't even been born yet.

Although the upfront costs and the inconvenience of construction are large detractors, the potential benefits are realistic and vital to a better future. NYC was torn up for years when the subway was under construction and the cost was high but it has become the lifeblood of that city. The same can be said for Portland, San Francisco and other cities that are similar to our metro.

Places like Selby/Grand and NE Minneapolis were in decline until vision and investment made them into destinations and I want that for my Eastside as well as for the rest of St. Paul. The exciting thing is that it has already started and a streetcar system would continue that progress.

My husband and I love St. Paul and love being so close to downtown but the conveniences of the LRT line are a little too far to make it easily useable for us on a daily basis. We love going to the Farmers' Market, Central Library, the History Center and the Children's and Science Museums downtown but often parking costs are prohibitive and inconvenient. More over, walking downtown in the winter is not an option, especially with winters like this last year's.

We hope the 7th Street line is the first step in a network of streetcar lines and would connect East and West 7th, making it more viable for us to visit the unique stores and destinations W 7th has to offer and help showcase the wonderful shops and restaurants we have to share on the Eastside.

We are eager for the eventual connection to Victoria Park where our children go to school. This would bring us closer to that community.

We are hoping that other neighborhoods connected to future streetcar and light rail lines will be as easy to explore and discover. Gems like Como Park, the River Walks and Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary could be appreciated as the natural treasures they are.

My brother, who is in the Army and has traveled the world, says that St. Paul is one of his favorite cities to fly into because it is so lush and green, not grey concrete like many other cities. The streetcar lines would connect our parks and lakes for recreation. My family has a goal to picnic in a different park each weekend and it would be fun and convenient to use the streetcar to continue that tradition.

There is so much potential for our fair city and so much good that is already happening. I think it is important to move swiftly in a time when construction costs rise each year and lay the groundwork now for a vibrant and complete rail system. As the Greenline LRT demonstrates, these investments will yield obvious benefits. Our goal as a community should be the investment in our and our children's futures and the perpetual revitalization of our city.

Thank you very much for hearing me and allowing this open forum, Jennifer Mason