

Friday, February 3, 2017

Open Letter and Report by Bill Hosko

On Friday, January 27 in downtown Saint Paul a community meeting was held to discuss growing security problems - particularly within the skyway system and areas surrounding the Central Station Light Rail Transit stop (LRT), completed in 2014.

Shared were some words of wisdom, some grand standing and finger-pointing aplenty. The meeting, months overdue, was hosted by the downtown district council (one of seventeen city-wide), an organization manipulated by Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman for years.

Below, is a report I passed to the room of 60 people (there was also an accompanying set of illustrations and photos, both were evidence of my earlier warnings about what city leadership was about to create). Beginning on page 3, please find a just completed photographic report on the serious situation downtown Saint Paul is now in and on pages 9-10, an action plan to reverse it.

The two dailies, Star Tribune and Pioneer Press, wrote about the January 27 meeting. They did so poorly, being they provided no follow-up questions to statements made. Namely, where were those in elected and community leadership positions when the LRT route and subsequent LRT stair tower at the Central Station were being planned and Mayor Coleman was discarding all common-sense?

Why didn't these papers ask who planned this transit and skyway disaster? It wasn't a spontaneous event. The Pioneer Press gave Mayor Coleman cover by printing, "A spokeswoman for Mayor Chris Coleman's office later said the mayor had not been invited to the meeting, but that efforts are moving forward on several fronts." The Trib's title was, "Critics: Downtown St. Paul skyways are unsafe, unsightly and mismanaged". Critics? No, these people were Residents and Business and Property Owners and Managers, daily witnessing the mess.

Both left out reference to my information, history on the situation going back many years and solutions - mustn't point out the obvious. The smaller papers, will now likely follow suit. Sorry folks, but it's the typical path in Saint Paul. Perhaps City Pages will come to the rescue of the truth, again - and report on the facts surrounding how this mess occurred under Mayor Chris Coleman's direction.

Downtown property manager Julie Bach was quoted in defense of securing her building further, "I can't manage my building effectively with the level of homelessness and youth... For safety purposes, we have to manage our buildings as best we can."

Homelessness in downtown is at historic levels and growing and youth with no place to go is the highest its been in years. Subsequently, downtown quality of life crimes are steadily rising. One meeting attendee thoughtlessly stated that we just built a new, larger Dorothy Day for the homeless, why don't they stay there? That's because most can not stay there during the day, nor do they want to stay in something that looks like a low-budget hospital (another faux community input effort), and Mayor Coleman is now supporting an even larger phase-two. As for the youth, sadly, they have lived their lives in a public transit and downtown environment that generally accepts swearing, yelling and other anti-social behavior as the norm. They have known nothing else.

None of these are good optics for Mayor Coleman's fantasy gubernatorial run. So, to cover his mistakes he will soon grandstand and at even further cost to taxpayers install more police and perhaps a police precinct tucked away inside the now vacant Pioneer Press building on Cedar Street. Realistically, and only because things have become so out of hand, the upcoming Skyway Ambassadors program has been created to monitor misbehavior, more than direct Visitors to destinations. Folks, we need cost-effective, sustainable, long-term solutions. They are below on pages 2, 9 and 10.

Best regards,

Bill Hosko

January 27, 2017

To: Capitol River Council (CRC) Skyway Committee meeting attendees

Re: Repairing measures to restore a sense of security in the downtown Skyway system post installation of St Paul's Light Rail Green Line

The current situation was largely avoidable: In 2009 and 2010, leadership was contacted about the negative security consequences of running light rail down Cedar and Fourth Street versus installing light rail on Jackson Street.

In 2014, leadership was contacted about the security consequences of demolishing the two existing, beautiful and expensive bus shelters at 5th and Minnesota, this would cause people to use the new LRT stair tower and skyway as a shelter.

The situation today:

1. Loitering, sleeping, littering, illegal drug use, urinating and even defecating have become problems in the stair tower and or the immediate skyway system vicinity.
2. Loitering and misconduct throughout the skyway system has grown in recent years.
3. Downtown has experienced an historic decline of retail businesses in the last twenty years and an historic decline of office tenants in the last ten years. (Housing growth has subsequently occurred largely to fill the empty office buildings).
5. The skyway bridge over LRT's Central Station is the only one which takes people from Lowertown and the heart of downtown to the Saint Paul Hotel, Saint Paul Public Library and RiverCentre/Xcel Energy Center areas (With all due respect, this would not be the case if Mayor Coleman had not given the owner of the Wabasha Court building at 6th and Wabasha permission to demolish that sound building years ago, while he was on the city council, without there being a redevelopment plan in place (today it remains a parking lot). This in turn took down an important skyway link to the Hamm building and an opportunity to connect the Lawson/Infor block to the core of downtown via a second skyway route to the Macy's/Wells Fargo Center block)
6. While statistics may show, people are generally safe (as long as they don't tell people engaging in illegal activity to behave themselves), perception IS reality.
7. In conclusion, many people – residents, office workers and visitors, no longer feel safe in the skyway system and particularly in the area of the Central LRT Station and stair tower.

Overall, the two most effective remedies:

1. Adjacent to the Central Station LRT stop, on the small vacant triangle of land at Cedar and Fifth Streets, we need to construct a combined, two-level, security center and public transit waiting area.
2. We need to install security cameras, with audio, throughout the skyway system, particularly in the blocks without evening and night-time security. Those who are engaging in inappropriate or illegal behavior can be monitored and addressed by audio, from the security center. If the situation persists law enforcement could be dispatched. This scenario helps avoid in-person confrontations.

In part, text from my March 2014 letter Metropolitan Council Chair Haige, Mayor Coleman, Councilmember Thune and CRC Director Bengstrom, "Invest the significant funds saved with this alternate plan (preservation of the two \$316,000 bus shelters at Fifth and Minnesota about to be replaced at great expense) into a combined transit security center, waiting room and public restroom on the adjacent small triangle of land owned by the Met-Council on the southeast corner of the Fifth and Cedar streets intersection.

In a security center specifically here, transit officers can (rather than sitting in idling vehicles) monitor the bus shelters, the new \$1.7 million skyway connected stairwell and elevator tower and the central light rail stop, simultaneously. As well, the public gets a comfortable and safe waiting and restroom facility at one of the busiest public transit junctions in the city."

In conclusion, every day that we do not address the skyway security situation effectively costs this city and our downtown in a multitude of ways. Increasing police foot-patrols and having citizen volunteers monitor skyway conduct are good short-term actions, but not long-term solutions.

Transit users, skyway users and our downtown business and residential community (and taxpayers) deserve a permanent, lasting solution. With all due respect, the recent installation of a Port a Potty behind the LRT stair tower is a disgrace to the city and the \$1 billion Green Line.

Thank you.

Bill Hosko

Friday, February 3, 2017

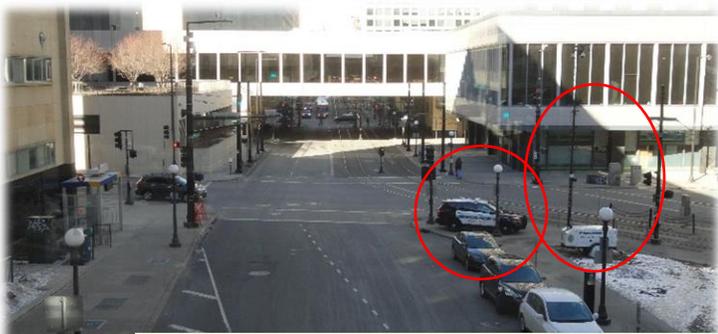
Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman on December 13, 2016 announced (from a bar while raising a glass of beer) that he was running for Minnesota Governor because, "People are worried about their jobs and their future. If you look at the work we've done in St. Paul ... I think that will resonate with people across the state of Minnesota."

Below, are samples of Chris Coleman's 'work in Saint Paul'. I have known him for many years. Surely, few politicians have ever cast aside common sense so often and squandered so many outstanding opportunities, for so long. This, is why Minnesotans should be "worried about their future" - Chris Coleman may be directing it.

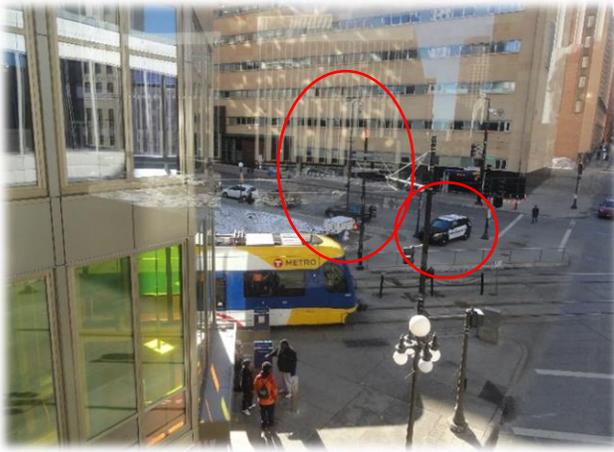
Bill Hosko



Opened in 2014, results of the billion-dollar light rail line: Left photos and illustration: before LRT, promised LRT, and received LRT. Police monitoring has risen dramatically, graffiti is glorified in the Central Station's design and in the heart of downtown Saint Paul, Minnesota a Port-a-Potty serves as the public-transit restroom. So classy!

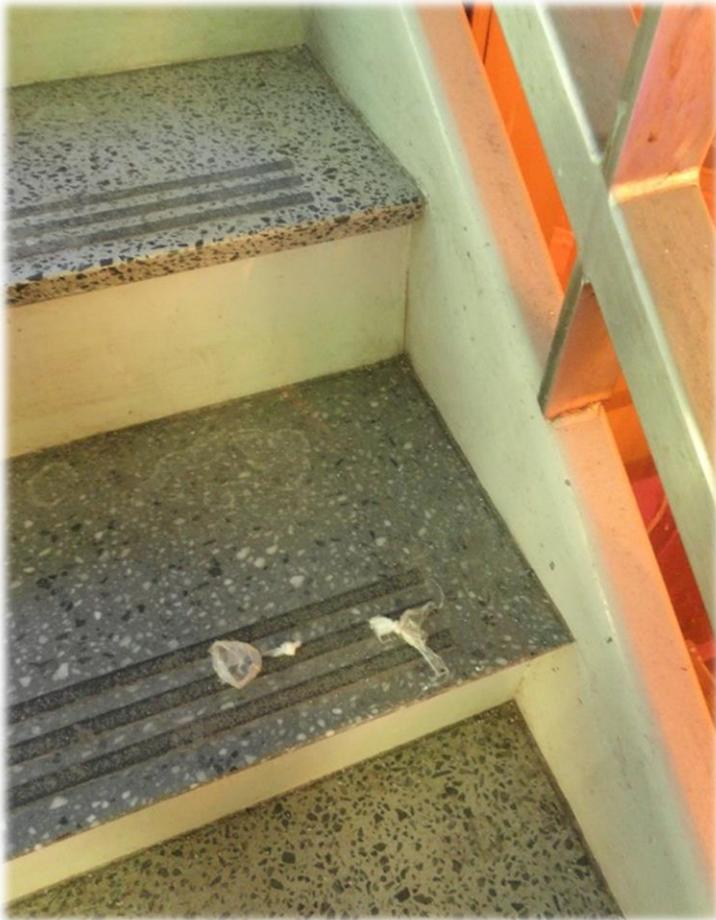


LRT promotional materials included the misleading middle image (above middle left) and accompanying misleading text stating that it, "demonstrates the potential for reclaiming the pedestrian realm created by LRT... results from the removal of two lanes allows for more pedestrian amenities and additional street planting and creates a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross the street". The before and after photos show how misleading they were.



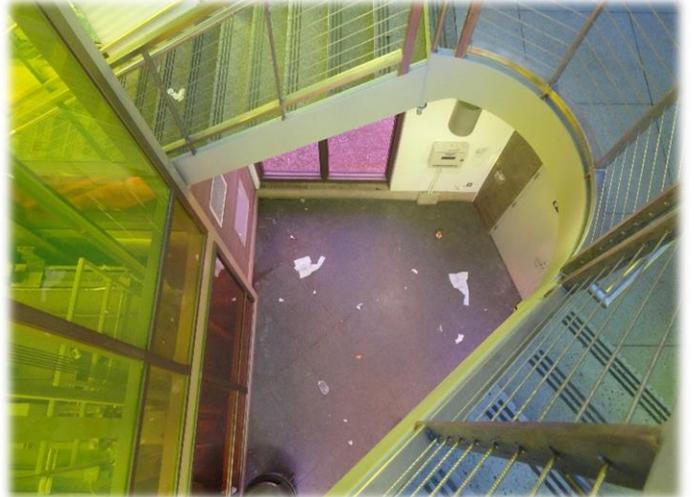
Top left: Close-up of Central Station's \$1.7 million stair tower.
Top right: This adjacent lot offers the best opportunity to correct Mayor Coleman's egregious public transit planning mistakes (see pages 9-10).
Middle left: our very own Port-a-Potty - in the center of it all!
Above: nearby deteriorating wall and dead weeds.
Left: 5 trees planted in 2014 - one survived - broken and barely alive.
The other 4 died - replaced with asphalt.
Below: New landscaping is crushed and dead behind a new bus shelter.
The graffiti compliments nearby Central Station's graffiti 'art'.





Images taken on 1-29-17 - two days after a community meeting where the Public and Business Community expressed outrage over growing security and maintenance issues surrounding this light rail stop and the downtown skyway system.

Here are remnants of drug use, litter is everywhere and obviously, the structure has not been cleaned properly since its completion in 2014.





After just recently spending nearly \$1.3 billion in taxpayer funds for transit improvements in downtown Saint Paul, the results of Mayor Chris Coleman's love and respect for the image of Minnesota's Capital City is obvious... and now he wants to lead all Minnesota...



The adjacent Athletic Club's owner said at the 1-27-17 community meeting "What in the hell is going on?"
 Meanwhile, his own skyway section has been poorly maintained for years:

On 1-29-17 the fire exit was blocked by a low hanging theater rope. It is unlit and scary for passersby - especially kids. Door handles are dirty. A portion of the heating register was improperly disconnected years ago, and the entire register is dirty.

Because Mayor Coleman destroyed the only other viable skyway route years ago (Page 8), this remains the *only* skyway route that takes people to the Saint Paul Public Library, City Hall, the St. Paul Hotel and Xcel Energy Center/RiverCentre.



1-29-17 Above: Crossing by skyway over Cedar Street from the Athletic Club we enter the now vacant Pioneer Press building (The historic Pioneer Press building in Lowertown is another property).

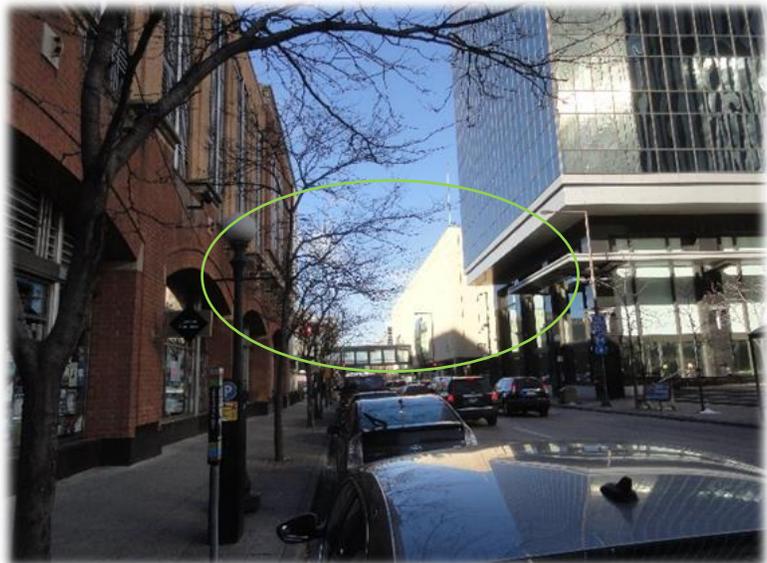
The Pioneer Press supported Mayor Chris Coleman's foolish 'vision' for downtown. Afterwards, they sold their building here and moved across the river. Their skyway carpet was recently pulled up due to the smell of urine and feces... the couple in the photo held each other as they memorably made their way to the Saint Paul Hotel...





Other Mayor Chris Coleman legacies are nearby:

While on the city council he foolishly approved demolition of the former Wabasha Court building (above), without there being a firm redevelopment plan in place. This decreased property tax revenue and destroyed a key skyway connection to the Hamm building (left in red) and the ability to connect with the Lawson/Infor building - designed to accept one over 6th Street (left in green).



He celebrates now, the imminent removal of the 'skyway to nowhere' he created. Further, in 2014, Mayor Coleman instructed the Port Authority to buy, then demolish Macy's - cost to taxpayers \$15 million - to create a hole (after he'd already foolishly demolished Wabasha Court and created the parking lot across the street years earlier).

Thankfully, he was told no.

Macy's (above photos) is now being redeveloped by the Port Authority, using more tax dollars (Their redevelopment plans & proposed exterior façade are lackluster (above). More later.

It is critical to downtown and to Macy's redevelopment success to re-attach the building to the southwest skyway system which includes: the Lawson/Infor building, Saint Paul Hotel, Public Library and Xcel Energy Center/RiverCentre.

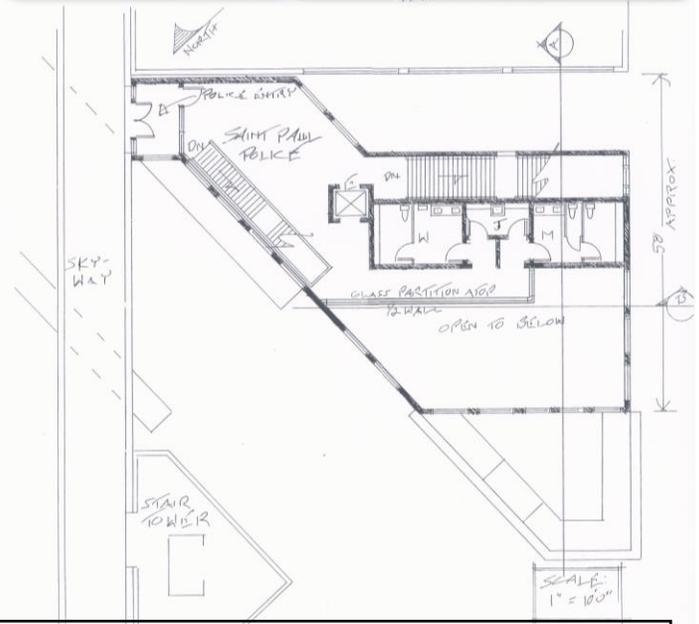
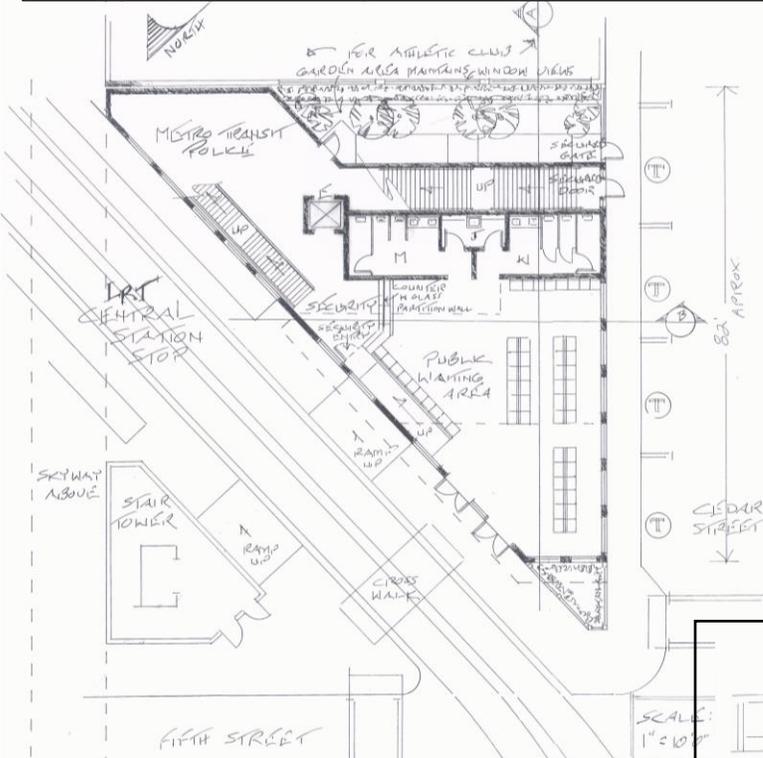
The most efficient way now would be from the Lawson/Infor block across to the Ecolab University (EU) building (left), which has a skyway to Macy's. EU is being vacated by Ecolab, so now may be the time to create the skyway link!

Summary:

To correct Mayor Chris Coleman's serious security and public health issues now surrounding public transit and the skyway system in downtown Saint Paul, the public needs more than increased police patrols, cameras and a possible police precinct off-site from the center of the situation - the LRT Central Station, stair tower and its skyway connection.

The most effective, sustainable, long-term plan calls for an on-site:

1. Security Center for both Metro-Transit & Saint Paul Police
2. Secured Public Waiting Room with Restrooms
3. Monitoring station for a new downtown skyway system-wide, security camera *with* audio system



Details about the Metro Transit - Public Waiting Room and Security Center concept

1. Utilizes a small parcel of land that is currently a publicly owned, poorly maintained lawn (Chris Coleman's and other's plans to install a park here instead are incredulous and would only exasperate existing problems)
2. Design specifically compliments the adjoining stair tower and surrounding buildings
3. Fully accessible and is immediately adjacent to bus stops and the LRT Central Station
4. Provides comfortable seating for 50 with room for those standing
5. Provides for two easily monitored Public Restrooms - much needed in the heart of downtown
6. Provides for an elevated security desk area
7. Provides room for Metro Transit Police - first floor, instant access to LRT station, bus stops and designated parking
8. Provides room for Saint Paul Police - second floor, instant access to skyway system, designated parking
9. Provides room for a downtown skyway system-wide, security camera and audio system monitoring station
10. Provides a secured rear exit to move in custody individuals to a police vehicle
11. Retains a garden view for first and second floor tenants in the adjacent Athletic Club/Hotel 340 building
12. This location and two-level design allows Police to visually monitor a large area

Bonnie, a retired college instructor and long-time acquaintance of mine and resident of downtown 22 years, helped proof this document. It's her fault now if I missed something... Upon completion, she turned to me while sitting at my desk and computer here in my gallery, and said, "As a resident, it is disgusting and an embarrassment to me when I see to the poor upkeep, particularly on the weekends. It is even more embarrassing when I have out of town guests. This is my home."

Bill Hosko 2-3-17