



Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Public Works

Date: September 24, 2013

To: Honorable Sandra Colvin Roy, Chair Transportation & Public Works
Committee

Subject: **Public Hearing: Locally Preferred Alternative for the Nicollet-Central
Transit Alternatives Study**

Recommendation:

1. Approve a Locally Preferred Alternative for the Nicollet-Central Transit Alternatives Study
2. Recommend the Locally Preferred Alternative to the Metropolitan Council for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Policy Plan

Previous Directives:

- May 25, 2012 – City Council authorized a contract with URS Corporation to provide professional services to conduct an alternatives analysis in the Nicollet Avenue and Central Ave corridor.
- July 2, 2010 – City Council authorized submittal of an application for federal funding to conduct an alternatives analysis for an initial streetcar line within the Nicollet Avenue and Central Avenue corridors.
- April 2, 2010 – City Council approved the long-term streetcar network; authorized staff to engage partner agencies and private stakeholders to determine whether the City should enter into the federal project development process; and directed staff to return to T&PW Committee at least quarterly with a report on streetcars.
- March 23, 2010 – T&PW received and filed Streetcar Funding Study.
- January 22, 2008 – T&PW received and filed Streetcar Feasibility Study.

Department Information:

Prepared by: Anna Flintoft, Transportation Planner, 673-3885
Charleen Zimmer, Interim Project Manager, Nicollet-Central Transit Alternatives
Project, 612-354-2101

Approved by: _____

Steven A. Kotke, P.E., Director of Public Works

Presenters in Committee: Anna Flintoft, Charleen Zimmer

Financial Impact

- No financial impact

Community Impact

- Neighborhood Notification: A series of public open houses were held in August and September.
- City Goals: Jobs & Economic Vitality - Planes, trains and streetcars move goods and workers smartly; Strong commercial corridors, thriving business corners. Livable Communities, Healthy Lives - Equitable, integrated transit system.

Supporting Information

In late 2007, the City completed a streetcar feasibility study that identified a long-term network of seven modern streetcar corridors. In 2010, the City completed a funding study that explored options for funding streetcar implementation. In 2010, the City Council prioritized the Nicollet Avenue and Central Avenue corridors as the best place to start implementation of the long-term network and directed staff to seek grant funds to conduct an Alternatives Analysis study for the Nicollet-Central Corridor. The City was subsequently awarded a \$900,000 competitive grant from the Federal Transit Administration to conduct the Alternatives Analysis, the result of which is identification of the locally preferred alternative (LPA).

Work on the Alternatives Analysis Study began in late 2012 and has included:

- Phase I: Finalizing purpose and need and evaluation measures, completed in fall 2012
- Phase II: Initial screening of a universe of alternatives and defining the alternatives to be evaluated in detail, completed in winter 2013
- Phase III: Detailed evaluation of alternatives, completed in summer 2013
- Phase IV: Selection of an LPA, currently underway

Throughout the process, a community engagement and decision-making framework has guided the work, which has included a Technical Community Advisory Committee (TCAC), a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), open houses at key decision points, presentations to stakeholder organizations, and online surveys.

The third phase of study, the detailed evaluation of alternatives, was completed this summer and presented to the public at a series of four open houses. The alternatives evaluated in detail include a no-build alternative, a 9-mile streetcar alternative, and a 9-mile enhanced bus alternative, as well as a shorter 3.5-mile streetcar alternative. The alignment for these alternatives follows Nicollet Avenue S, Nicollet Mall and Central Avenue NE between 46th Street on the south and 41st Avenue NE on the north with an option to cross the Mississippi River on either the Hennepin/1st Avenue bridge or the Central/3rd Avenue bridge.

Key results of the detailed evaluation of alternatives presented at the open houses and to the TCAC and PAC include:

- streetcar has greater ridership and economic development benefits than enhanced bus

- streetcar has higher capital costs and operating and maintenance costs than enhanced bus
- streetcar and enhanced bus have similar operating and maintenance costs per passenger
- a streetcar alignment crossing the Mississippi River on the Hennepin/1st Avenue bridge has greater benefits and lower cost than the Central/3rd Avenue bridge and does not preclude future changes in traffic operations along Hennepin Avenue and 1st Avenue
- a starter streetcar line is more financially feasible than a long streetcar line, and a starter line operating between Lake Street and 5th Street SE has the highest concentration of benefits related to ridership, regional transit connections, economic development and affordable housing within the Nicollet-Central Corridor

Four open houses were held on August 6, 7, and 14 and September 9, 2013, and public comment period concluded September 15, 2013. Presentations were also made to neighborhood and business association meetings during August and September. In general, public sentiment can be characterized as:

- very strong preference for streetcar as a mode
- preference for the Hennepin Avenue river crossing
- general support for the 3.5 mile starter line between Lake Street, but a desire to carry the alignment further north towards Lowry Avenue NE

The TCAC met on August 19, 2013 and provided input to the PAC that for the LPA:

- streetcar is the preferred mode
- the Hennepin Avenue bridge is the preferred river crossing
- a starter streetcar line should extend from Lake Street on the south to as far north of downtown as is financially feasible

The PAC met on September 19, 2013 and recommended the Locally Preferred Alternative as modern streetcar running between Lake Street and approximately 5th Street NE on Nicollet Avenue, Nicollet Mall, and Hennepin/1st Avenues, using the Hennepin Avenue bridge to cross the Mississippi River, and further acknowledged that an extension of modern streetcar further northeast of downtown is desirable, the length of which depends on funding availability and the location of an operations and maintenance facility

To be eligible for federal and regional funds for major transit capital projects, the LPA must be approved by the Metropolitan Council and amended into the Regional Transportation Policy Plan. The next action that is necessary is for the Minneapolis City Council to recommend an LPA to the Metropolitan Council. A draft resolution is attached.

Other future tasks that will need to be accomplished to position the streetcar starter line for federal funding including completion of an Environmental Assessment and preliminary engineering, development of a funding plan, and preparation and approval of interagency agreements for these and other future tasks.

Attachment: Draft resolution