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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Robert Bauman
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Meeting Next Week on MKE's Future High Speed Rail Line

Economic benefits of high speed line will be focus of Midwest High Speed Rail Association's informal session at Public Market

The significant economic benefits of the proposed Milwaukee-to-Madison high speed rail line will be the focus of an informal public meeting next Thursday (July 22) hosted by the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, according to **Alderman Robert J. Bauman**.

The noon hour "brown bag lunch" session starts at 12 p.m. July 22 and will be held at the Milwaukee Public Market, 400 N. Water St. in the Historic Third Ward. The public and media are invited to attend.

In January the federal government awarded \$823 million to Wisconsin to develop the Milwaukee-to-Madison high speed rail system, with \$810 million earmarked for upgrading existing rail lines and constructing stations. The state Department of Transportation is already moving forward with contracts for upgrading the existing rail lines between Milwaukee and Madison to accommodate high speed passenger trains, Alderman Bauman said.

"The high speed rail infrastructure is becoming a reality, and with that will come economic development that could create thousands of good-paying jobs in Milwaukee and communities stretching from Waukesha to Madison," said Alderman Bauman.

Although the next governor could block the appropriation of state funds for high speed rail operating costs, Alderman Bauman said that would set up "the rather ridiculous situation of having a new and upgraded rail line with no trains running on it."

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High Speed Rail Talk/ADD ONE

“It would be like spending \$823 million on a new highway and then refusing to fund the cost of policing, snow plowing, routine maintenance, or even street lights, thereby effectively preventing motor vehicles from using that new road,” Alderman Bauman said.

“I believe it is highly unlikely that any reasonable elected official, even a conservative elected official, will allow this to happen especially in light of the fact that, unlike local transit, intercity rail passengers tend to be middle- and upper-middle class persons who vote, including campaign contributing business persons,” he said.

The state Department of Transportation is expected to let contracts for all or most of the \$823 million prior to January 2011. Alderman Bauman said a significant number of jobs will be attached to these contracts and “politically powerful and well connected engineering firms and road builders will likely be the contractors.”

“Because the necessary funding agreements for the work have been entered into between the state DOT and the Federal Railroad Administration, they are immovable and set in stone,” he said.

In addition, if these contracts are cancelled down the road, some portion of the federal money would have to be refunded or the federal government will simply deduct the money from Wisconsin’s federal highway appropriation, meaning fewer dollars for the Zoo Interchange and countless other highway projects, the alderman said. “In short the next governor will face the choice of either allowing the work to proceed or asking the legislature to write a check for the federal funds expended to date, and I cannot envision the latter scenario happening,” he said.

“This high speed rail line will become reality no matter what talk radio says, so even opponents would be well advised to make the best of this infrastructure investment,” Alderman Bauman said.

Alderman Bauman has said advocates of transportation choice and sustainable transportation infrastructure have been waiting decades for a high speed rail connection between Wisconsin’s two largest cities, and “it is exciting that this connection will now be built.”