Time to let the public decide on the streetcar

Statement from Alderman Joe Davis, Sr. November 26, 2014

The mayor's most recent aggressive push to ram the Streetcar project down the public's throat has solidified my decision to join Alderman Donovan with the collection of signatures to force a referendum on the proposed borrowing for this project.

The rush to spend the ancient federal allocation from the USDOT that the Mayor has failed to spend, *and* pass the additional cost from this project to the citizens of this city -- who least can afford it -- is shameful.

The unfortunate incident in Ferguson, MO has confirmed my disappointment with the City of Milwaukee's priorities. Remember, we have similar economic and social conditions here that exist in Ferguson, but the mayor continues to put his priority into a streetcar that he says will attract new people to Milwaukee's downtown. He pursues this boondoggle while he consistently fails to address the existing economic and social needs of Milwaukee's African American and Latino communities.

Clearly, the bulk of the ridership data for the current transit system is from the north and near south side of the City of Milwaukee where there is a heavy population of Latinos and African Americans. Data also shows that the majority of transit ridership uses public transportation for employment purposes, not for tourism or luxury. As a former Milwaukee County Supervisor, I had the pleasure of being mentored on this issue by former County Supervisor James White, and advised by County Supervisor Michael Mayo, the past and present chairs of Milwaukee County's Transportation, Public Works, and Transit Committee. To continue on this path of hypothetical transit ridership is dangerous and emulates a failed pass.

The seasonal trolleys that were supposed to increase transit ridership downtown have not met their much ballyhooed projections, and are always nearly empty when I see them go by. Now we are pursuing an even more expensive system with the intent of tearing up our public infrastructure without a long term maintenance plan (oh I forgot, put it on the taxpayer!). In addition to the long term cost of maintenance, we have no operator selected, there will be vertical easements required, and the taxpayers are asked to foot the bill by creating a TIF district to cover the cost of relocating utilities that the State has required the City to pay. Coupled with unreasonable revenue projections, this can become dangerously expensive, all while other parts of the city continue to deteriorate.

So because the public will potentially have to foot the bill on this risky endeavor, I say let our citizens decide whether to pay the cost of this "Streetcar Named Ego."