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NIK KOVAC
ALDERMAN, 3RD DISTRICT
CITY OF MILWAUKEE

A big league city needs big league public transit options

Statement of Alderman Nik Kovac November 19, 2014

Milwaukee is a big league city. I'm not just talking about the Bucks, the Brewers and the Packers. Across all categories of culture, we punch above our weight. Whether it's the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, the Symphony, the Orchestra, Pabst and Turner Halls, the Art Museum, the Harley Museum, Discovery World or Summerfest, we are a destination for artists and lovers of culture from across the world.

There is one major category, however, where we come up way short. Take a look at the list of cities with fixed rail as the spine of their transit system, and we are the only major league city without it.

After decades of waiting, planning and debating, that is finally about to change. In the next few weeks the Common Council will be voting on the Mayor's bold new plan for public transit, and I will be proudly voting YES.

These 4.6 miles of streetcar track will connect the Intermodal Station to the lakefront and both of those places to the rest of downtown and the lower east side. Those miles of track will spur new cranes in the sky for developments that could total a private investment of \$2 billion.

The money we will invest to make that happen is \$59 million. Without that investment, that additional tax base simply won't be there. We are not diverting tax dollars from other priorities. We are creating new resources. It is a smart investment by any measure.

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And these tracks are just the beginning. Extensions are planned to the northeast, the north, the west and the south. Even with these valuable connections to our neighborhoods, the streetcar will never replace our bus system. Rather, the fixed rail and the rubber tires will work together—like they do in every other major American city—to get people around.

In fact, this investment in a fixed rail spine to our regional transit system will increase ridership and thereby reverse the current downward spiral. In the last decade, we have lost riders, investment and routes. That will now change. Bus riders throughout the city and county will benefit from a reinvigorated commitment to alternative transportation.

I am proud to live in this great, beautiful, diverse and vibrant city. Like so many of my neighbors, we can't wait to make this an even better place to live, work, play and get around in.

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