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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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FOR INFORMATION CALL

January 27, 2015

Ald. Joe Davis, Sr.  
(414) 286-3787

## Local transit union opposes Milwaukee streetcar plans

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998, representing more than 1,700 Milwaukee County Transit workers, is now among the growing list of organizations and businesses that oppose the mayor's proposed streetcar, Alderman Joe Davis, Sr. said Tuesday.

"It may seem odd for our union to oppose a streetcar which will undoubtedly create many jobs for our members," reads a letter (attached) that ATU Local 998 mailed to Alderman Davis. "However, based on our recent experience with streetcar projects throughout the U.S., we believe that your resources would be more wisely spent on the expansion of your bus network."

Alderman Davis, a leader in the opposition to the streetcar proposal, welcomed the letter from the transit union. "ATU Local 998 readily admits that their members would have jobs driving the streetcar," Alderman Davis said. "But they see the bigger picture—that this project is a diversion of resources away from the areas of greatest need that will saddle Milwaukee with an unnecessary intrusion for years to come."

The ATU letter continues, "Despite the serious need for the expansion of Milwaukee Transit, a groundbreaking new study by the Brookings Institution found that less than half of all jobs in the region are reachable via transit within 90 minutes. One-third of working-age residents do not even live near a transit stop. A streetcar is not going to help these people."

"This is about advocating to start solving serious problems in this city by addressing Milwaukee's negative economic, social and crime statistics," Alderman Davis said. "True transit riders deserve better."



# Amalgamated Transit Union

5025 Wisconsin Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016-4139

202-537-1645 Fax 202-244-1726

Office of the International President

January 26, 2015

Council Member Joe Davis, Sr.  
City Hall  
200 E. Wells Street  
Room 205  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Council Member Davis:

On behalf of the more than 1,700 Milwaukee County Transit workers who are members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 998, I am writing to urge you to oppose the streetcar plan which is under consideration by the Council. By way of background, ATU is the largest union representing transit workers in the U.S. with nearly 200,000 members throughout North America. Our members include bus and train operators, mechanics, and other transit and intercity bus employees.

As the largest labor organization representing transit workers in North America, ATU of course overwhelmingly supports increased investment in public transportation projects across the nation. Over the years, we have initiated and supported countless campaigns in support of new rail projects and increased service on existing bus lines. Therefore, it may seem odd for our union to oppose a streetcar which will undoubtedly create many jobs for our members. However, based on our recent experience with streetcar projects throughout the U.S., we believe that your resources would be more wisely spent on the expansion of your bus network. In fact, we are very concerned that the streetcar will negatively impact existing bus routes and hurt the working families who rely on them.

Driven by real estate developers claiming that streetcars will provide a boost to the local economy, many cities attempting to rejuvenate their downtown areas see these short but very expensive rail lines as a way to attract "choice riders" – including tourists and others who can afford to drive but may be lured by the romance of an old fashioned rail car. The streetcar projects of today may certainly change the look of our downtown areas and distract people from urban decay. However, please do not confuse these beautification projects for public transportation, because they simply do not serve that function.

The overwhelming majority of people who ride public transit in Milwaukee are transit dependent. Many do not own a car. Others are too young or too old to drive. Despite the serious need for the expansion of Milwaukee Transit, a groundbreaking new study by the Brookings Institution found that less than half of all jobs in the region are reachable via transit within 90



minutes. One-third of working-age residents do not even live near a transit stop. A streetcar is not going to help these people.

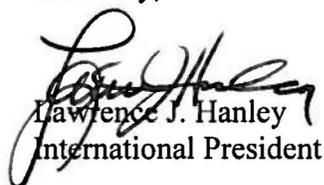
In addition, due to the local nature of public transit funding, operating resources, usually obtained through local sales taxes or property taxes, are extremely scarce, especially during economic downturns. When the economy plunged between 2008 and 2012, more than 85% of transit systems nationwide raised fares or slashed services. Streetcar localities forced to choose between making cuts on either the bus side or on their prized streetcar systems invariably slash bus service because turning away tourists is seen as unacceptable. Meanwhile, working class bus riders who can ill afford to pay more wind up absorbing the pain. Some have lost their jobs because their ride to work has been eliminated – all so some fancy streetcar that they will never use can keep crawling down the road while ringing a charming bell.

Moreover, the trend with the new streetcars is to operate them with foreign private companies that pay workers inferior wages and benefits. The result has been deteriorating service, fare hikes, and serious safety issues. When cities privatize streetcar operations, they lose control of their ability to respond to riders' concerns about quality of service issues, even as foreign companies drive service into the ground. Lower wages and reduced benefits are the open game plan of private providers, leading to dissatisfied workers. This culminates in major turnover issues, resulting in training problems, safety issues, etc. These companies are motivated only by profit rather than the provision of quality, affordable service.

We urge Milwaukee to not make the same mistake as other cities. While it is true that public transit is without question a key economic engine for any urban area, it is critical to note that such service must be able to provide mobility to all people attempting to move through the city, not just the ones who are passing through up-and-coming neighborhoods for a few days.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Lawrence J. Hanley  
International President

jr