

Date: June 30, 2021
To: Mayor James Mueller
From: The River Rail Task Force
Doug Hunt
Chuck Lehman
Lou Pierce
Jan Cervelli
Subject: Follow Up on 6-15-21 Meeting

Thank you for a very generous meeting and discussion on the next step toward the employment of a modern streetcar as a tool for growth and development of the larger South Bend – Mishawaka - Notre Dame community. The purpose of this memo is to share ideas with you for a clear path for the Modern streetcar as well as to follow up on our requests for your leadership and the City of South Bend’s funding of the Feasibility Study.

We are encouraged by your understanding of and support for transit-oriented development as an essential focus for the City of South Bend and surrounding community going forward. The most important driver of the transit-oriented development equation is the transit part – the modern streetcar. For without a modern streetcar, there is no transit-oriented development. And, without a well-planned, coordinated transit-oriented corridor, the redevelopment of South Bend will be hampered by a long and protracted process of fits and starts of piecemeal, disconnected, car-dependent developments.

You also made clear your understanding that the time to act on securing local, state, and federal funding for modern streetcar is now. You identified two major obstacles to this project that we would like to help you address. You strongly articulated the need for equity in the allocation of infrastructure resources in the city, particularly to West Side neighborhoods and businesses. You identified a logjam of interests around the rerouting of the South Shore commuter rail into the Downtown as a second obstacle.

We wholly agree and thus offer you a solution that addresses both concerns. Both obstacles could be addressed by a phased approach to the modern streetcar, one that includes a second Route 2 of The River Rail (see attached). Route 2 would run along Lincolnway West from Downtown South Bend to the South Bend International Airport including a Martin Luther King - Western Avenue - Michigan Avenue loop connecting South Bend History Museum, Studebaker National Museum, Kroc Center, Four Winds Field, Union Station Tech Center, and Purdue Polytechnic.

Route 2: Downtown South Bend – South Bend International Airport is proposed as the second phase of a system of modern streetcar routes completing a comprehensive east-west link extending from Downtown Mishawaka to the Airport. Route 2 not only provides an essential link to the Airport, it does so at a cost substantially lower than the extension of the South Shore Commuter Rail, could be completed in much less time, and cause substantially less disruption to existing neighborhoods and businesses.

The streetcar stops along Route 2 would also provide connectivity between neighborhoods and spur development of existing and new businesses along Lincolnway. Such benefits would not be possible with a commuter rail that would only stop in Downtown South Bend. Further, it would divide the neighborhoods it crossed into “north and south of the tracks”. We are all aware of examples of unfortunate decisions by other cities to force rail lines or highways through existing urban fabric destroying otherwise viable, healthy neighborhoods in the way.

Route 2: Downtown South Bend – South Bend International Airport would be undertaken upon completion and operation of the first phase, Route 1: University of Notre Dame - Downtown South Bend - Downtown Mishawaka. Route 1 is prioritized as it more closely meets the criteria for state and federal infrastructure funding, making it more competitive overall. The success of Route 1 will strengthen our case in state and federal grant proposals for the completion of the entire link with Route 2. We have asked HDR, the streetcar consultant, to prepare an addendum proposal for a Route 2 feasibility study.

During our meeting, we articulated three requests:

1. That you, as Mayor, serve as the champion of The River Rail project
2. The City of South Bend fund the HDR Feasibility Study
3. You establish a River Rail advisory committee comprised of representatives of south Bend-Mishawaka-Notre Dame to oversee the planning process.

We also offered to you our support in the following ways:

1. Provide insight and experience in transit-oriented development and modern streetcar corridor planning and design.
2. Provide information, case studies, and contacts on modern streetcars and transit-oriented developments in other cities to you, city staff, and the public.
3. Public and private advocacy and engagement with the City of Mishawaka, University of Notre Dame, and other constituencies throughout the community.

Lastly, we indicated our intentions to continue our advocacy of The River Rail regardless of the outcome of our meeting. Our discussion has further convinced us that The River Rail fits your stated goals as mayor as well as that of the larger South Bend-Mishawaka-Notre Dame community. The Biden Administration's Infrastructure bill grows closer to approval with \$49 billion slated for public transit. This project is within our collective capacity. We see no insurmountable obstacle nor any other viable alternative to comprehensive progress within our lifetimes.

We still believe you are the best choice to serve as the champion of this transformational project and that the City has an institutional responsibility to pursue the first step of the process by funding the HDR feasibility study. However, we have not heard back from you regarding your intentions. As time is of the essence and we are prepared to move forward, we respectfully request a response.

All important endeavors require clarity of position and purpose. If we do not hear back from you within the next week or so, we will assume you have declined our requests and do not see the need to take the first step by studying the feasibility of a modern streetcar in this community.

Obviously, we believe otherwise and would prefer your leadership. This is about the next generation; they are waiting to hear from you. However, time is of the essence and support for this transformational project is strong and growing. Fortunately, there are other champions in this community ready to step up and we will be engaging them next.

With great respect, Mr. Mayor, we look forward to your response.



Jan Cervelli
TheRiverRail Task Force



Doug Hunt



Chuck Lehman



Lou Pierce