



CITY OF WAUWATOSA

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TRAFFIC & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING Tuesday, February 24, 2009

PRESENT: Aids. Jay, Maher, McBride - 3

EXCUSED: Aids. Meaux, Stepaniak

ALSO PRESENT: W. Kappel, Dir. of Public Works; J. Archambo, City Admin.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. In the absence of the chair and vice chair, the committee appointed Ald. McBride as chair pro-tem.

Recommendations of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

Mr. Kappel, Director of Public Works, reported that the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority's recommendation discussed last week is one of the proposals in the governor's 2009-10 budget. As requested by the committee, he invited a representative of the RTA to make a presentation and answer questions.

Lori Richards of Mueller Communications, consultant for the RTA, distributed an overview of Governor Doyle's recommendations to the legislature. She explained that the RTA is an appointed body created in the 2007-09 state budget as a temporary study group to look at urgent transit needs in Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha Counties. The Milwaukee County appointee is George Torres, former county public works director now serving in another county position. Urgent transit needs were identified: the local bus transit funding crisis, service cuts that have made jobs inaccessible by transit, the fact that our region is falling behind being one of the last remaining states to fund transit through property taxes and having never secured a federal New Starts grant, and enhanced connections to Chicago to drive economic development. Ms. Richards reviewed those findings, as described in the handout. The recommendations to be considered in the 2009-10 budget proposal are:

- Creation of a permanent RTA for southeastern Wisconsin covering Kenosha and Milwaukee Counties and the urbanized area of Racine County east of I-94. Other municipalities in Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington counties, or the counties as a whole, may also join. Similar RTAs would be created in Dane County and the Fox Valley. To join the Southeastern RTA, the governing bodies must adopt a resolution authorizing membership.
- Authorization to subcontract with current operators for local bus transit service or assume operations as appropriate. Under current language, RTAs would still be able to establish a local transit planning group in each county to develop a transit service plan and budget for submittal to the Southeastern RTA.
- Authorization to levy up to a 0.5 percent sales tax for transit. Milwaukee County is expected to need 0.5 percent; Racine and Kenosha Counties are expected to need 0.2-0.3 percent.
- Bonding authority to cover capital improvements

Ms. Richards reported that local support for the RTA and KRM commuter rail project includes the Milwaukee County Board, Milwaukee Common Council, Kenosha and Racine County Boards, Racine Common Council, the Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Milwaukee, various civic groups such as the MMAC and GMC, and various labor groups.

Ms. Richards noted that the RTA study group's recommendation to tie any tax shift to mandatory property tax relief did not make it into the budget proposal. The RTA plans to continue to work with legislators to inform them of that strong recommendation.

Ms. Richards reported that the Milwaukee County Board appointed a study committee that came up with recommendations two weeks ago. If Wauwatosa wishes to take a stand, she recommended contacting State Senator Sullivan and local state representatives. The RTA needs to be in the budget at the state level before local elected officials will have the ability to approve or opt out or into it.

Richard Bachman, 2229 N. 115th Street, questioned the proposed sales tax, which he felt senior citizens would not support. Ms. Richards said that it would be used for the existing Milwaukee County Transit System as well as the RTA system.

Ald. Jay indicated that she is not in favor of this and would strongly disagree that the Council should recommend it. She felt that raising the sales tax will not help attract more businesses to our area, especially since it is already above that of other counties. She also raised concerns about the RTA's structure and said that environmental studies have found that light rail pollutes more than automobiles. We would be better off having cars that pick people up or giving people cars, she felt.

Ald. Maher noted that there was a strong argument from the RTA that it would be tax neutral. Currently, it would benefit property owners by removing from the county portion of the property tax bill the funds going to the bus service, which begs the question of the extent of shift to those without property, which the proposal does not address. He said that he does not know of any transit authority or rail system that is self sufficient. The flip side is that this is an investment. There are benefits associated with a rail system to those not using it as well as those using it. Ald. Maher said that one of his biggest questions and concerns is the extent to which the RTA would simply be another layer. He would prefer that it becomes the transit authority, but it seems that it would actually serve as a funding conduit to the counties, which is a concern given how the counties have handled transit systems. If going forward the RTA would be assuming responsibilities for a rail system and still contracting for transit, to what extent might that pose problems in coordination of a transit system? Also, there is some language in the budget about delaying the Zoo Interchange. To what extent could the RTA impact the design or address some of the congestion problems during construction? Also, could or should Wauwatosa have some greater representation on that transit authority given the potential local impact.

On the question of truly being a regional transit authority, Ms. Richards said that is the full intention but the having the ability to subcontract with current systems is a way to allow it to phase in. The region will not be able to get federal funding without a regional operator. The intent of the RTA is to run a regional body's transit system in addition to a regional rail system, but the governor and the RTA want to provide time to figure out the assets and liabilities of the Milwaukee County system and slowly merge and operate as one integrated system.

Asked about the possibility of stimulus funds, Ms. Richards said that SEWRPC and others are working on that. Part of the requirement is that projects be shovel ready. Since several track improvements included in the capital costs are considered ready, they may be able to get funds to offset some of the capital costs. Regarding the Zoo Interchange, there is a recommendation that local transit planning groups be formed in each county made up of either elected officials or appointees of each municipality to best address local concerns.

Ald. McBride noted that transit was a major aspect of his graduate degree studies, and he also related his familiarity with intermodal transportation systems in major cities where he has resided or visited. Our transit system here is dying, he said, and by 2010 it will not have operating funds for buses and federal funds for maintenance will also dry up. Transit systems may not pay for themselves, but highways don't either. We pay property and income taxes for the interstate highway system, for example. By taking cars off the road, we reduce the cost for creation, maintenance, and upkeep of roads. Bus routes have been eliminated to the point that people in the inner city cannot get to jobs without the use of privately funded transit lines. One-third of the

work force is eliminated with a car-only transit system since 32% of the people in the inner city are not licensed to drive. Regarding the claim of a negative sales tax impact on seniors, Ald. McBride said that they own disproportionately more property but are the lowest spenders and thereby least affected by sales tax. Families with young children are disproportionately taxed by a sales tax, so the tax burden would be moved to a different portion of the population. In response to the statement that transit systems pollute more than cars, he said that those who use the bus demand a smaller portion of roads and less extension of roads. He commented that it is remarkable that in this community we still don't have an authority that can run a bus or light rail system while other areas have cooperative efforts encompassing multiple local and state jurisdictions. He noted the civic groups and businesses that support dedicated funding and commented that economic development follows transit. He stated that he strongly supports the RTA.

Ald. Maher said he also strongly supports the RTA and would like to see the City take a position and forward that position to those who will be making the decision.

Moved by Ald. Maher, seconded by Ald. McBride to recommend that the Common Council take a position in favor of the RTA proposals contained in the governor's current 2009-10 budget proposal. Ayes: 2; Noes: 1 (Jay)

Pedestrian Safety During Winter Months in Non-Sidewalk Areas

The committee reviewed a February 18, 2009 memo from the Director of Public Works reporting on pedestrian safety in connection with use of roadways in areas with no sidewalks. Mr. Kappel explained that in previously stating his goal of making roadways safe for transportation first and foremost, he did not mean to imply that roadways were not safe for pedestrian use during winter months. Had conditions been unsafe this winter, Mr. Kappel was confident that he would have heard from school principals or parents, but he did not. After this past weekend's snowstorm, streets were found to be fairly bare in areas west of Mayfair Road where there are no sidewalks. Mr. Kappel concluded that the reduced salting policy now in effect is not impacting safety. He will follow up with a report at the end of the season.

A letter from the Wauwatosa post office expressing appreciation for the excellent job performed by the City's snowplow operators was provided and made part of the file.

Moved by Ald. Maher, seconded by Ald. Jay to place the matter on file. Ayes: 3

Delayed Start of Previously Approved 90-Day Trials

Mr. Kappel reported that 90-day trial changes approved by the committee in November were inadvertently missed and just recently made. A report will be forwarded after they have been in place for 90-days. The trials are for two-hour parking on the south side of Blanchard Street between N. 72nd and N. 74th Streets and for signage to allow parking other than during regular school hours in the Roosevelt School drop-off lane on N. 74th Street. New procedures should help ensure against this type of oversight in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

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