

Transportation Committee Presentation

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee

- My name is Joe Landsberger
- I am a life-long (age 77) citizen of Saint Paul, presently residing at 169 Goodrich Avenue, and am past president of the West Seventh Business Association, past president of Czech Slovak Sokol Minnesota, member and task force chair in the West Seventh Fort Road Federation/District 9 Community Council, neighborhood historian (six published histories) and co-chair of the Station Area Planning Task Force of the Riverview Corridor.

Mr. Chairman, H.F. 3718 addresses a very big subject: The future of Public Transit in the Metro Area, which has a lot to do with the future of the Metro Area.

Since 2016, I have followed what I consider a parochial, dysfunctional, narrow-minded approach to transit planning along Fort Road/West Seventh Street from Downtown Saint Paul out to the Airport and Mall of America. Historically

- In the 1800s the bluffs of the Mississippi River were blasted and the riverbanks filled to accommodate the railroads.
- In the 1930s 16 feet were taken from every property/building along the south side of West Seventh to improve automobile transit.
- In the 1950s whole neighborhoods were removed to build Shepard Road as an expressway—to further expedite traffic. Fountain Cave, a birthplace of the State of Minnesota, was destroyed.
- In the same decade, streetcar lines were replaced with buses as being a lower alternative! Oversight of the transition was marred with fraud and several convictions.
- In the 1960s and 70s 35E was built and more of our West End neighborhoods were removed.

We need not and should not repeat these historical precedents.

I believe putting rails and street cars along this neighborhood corridor will further destroy it's commercial, cultural, architectural, and residential character while diminishing transit quality and pre-empting the opportunity to build high quality regional caliber transit along better suited alignments nearby.

We are exceedingly frustrated with local governments' obsession for putting rails on Seventh that will contribute to congestion and crime here in the West End—all in the name of displacing neighborhoods for transit and high-rise development—and all in despite of 3,000 neighborhood signatories to a petition opposing rail on Seventh submitted to and ignored by Ramsey County officials.

When I became co-chair of the Station Area Planning Task Force of the Riverview Corridor, it was because I opposed rails on Seventh, and more importantly, believe that options were presented that were unilaterally ignored due to my county's obsession, that would enhance transit not only for the direct link between downtown, the airport and Mall, but also for suburbs west and our entire metro area. One option, Bus Rapid Transit, would be exponentially cheaper and quicker to build, and most critically, safer for the W. Seventh community.

Additionally, I have observed that environmental and engineering challenges to rails on Seventh are ignored, while countless dollars are spent on secondary design aspects, that could be better spent researching alternative transit alignments and modes.

I believe that the Metropolitan Council is better suited to oversee such decisions given their significant cost and impact, and the recalcitrance and myopia of my local officials to think more broadly.

Thank you
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