

NEWS RELEASE: Transit Alternatives advocate bobagain will protest at Met Council’s Committee meeting today the “lack of any public hearing” before a scheduled vote next week on the “slashed back” plan to be presented today for Southwest Light Rail



Note: A .pdf version of this News Release is attached.

Disclosure: bobagain is a registered Lobbyist, representing “*We the People*”, an informal association, and has announced a campaign to win a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, covering the unfolding “SWLRT disaster”.

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Minneapolis 7/1/15 – Transit Alternatives advocate, registered lobbyist and “candidate-journalist” Bob “Again” Carney Jr. (bobagain), will protest today at the Metropolitan Council’s Committee of the Whole (COTW) meeting the lack of any scheduled public hearing prior to the Council’s vote next week on a “slashed back” plan for the Southwest Light Rail project. Today’s COTW meeting is at 4 PM, at the Council’s headquarters, 390 Robert Street North, in Saint Paul.



The COTW is scheduled to hear a presentation of a plan to cut \$341 million from the current budget, which (most) recently exploded (again) to about \$2 billion. The Metropolitan Council is scheduled to vote on the plan July 8th. Although the Council did recently conduct required public hearings for the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS), people at those hearings were told to restrict their comments to the SDEIS -- which was prepared before the most recent SWLRT budget blow-up.

“It is outrageous that the Met Council is planning to vote on this new plan, only a week after it is presented, and without any opportunity for the public to testify to the Council about the plan,” bobagain said.

As a registered lobbyist, bobagain promoted the Legislature’s decision May 18th to cancel about \$30 million of an earlier appropriation for Southwest Light Rail, and to make that money available for transit operating

purposes. The Senate unanimously passed the “lights on” bill including that provision, and Gov. Mark Dayton signed it.

At the Minneapolis SDEIS public hearing, bobagain asked the Metro Council’s New Starts Director Mark Fuhrmann what the current rate of spending is for SWLRT. After an exchange of e-mails, Fuhrmann confirmed for attribution this statement: “The current rate of spending for the Southwest LRT project is \$3 to \$4 million per month, including both consulting costs and the cost of in-house staff time. This rate of spending is anticipated to continue for the next two or three months.”

Recently, it has emerged that the Metro Council is playing a kind of shell game -- using money from another fund to continue to pay expenses for Southwest Light Rail, and “backfilling” that money with the Legislature’s increase for operating expenses.

House Transportation Committee Chair Tim Kelly recently wrote a letter to the Metro Council, questioning the legality of the Council’s apparent plan to provide up to \$150 million of additional cash for the current Southwest Light Rail plan, assuming the Legislature does not provide any more money for it.

Kelly’s letter concluded: “The implications of the council’s proposed alternative funding scheme are staggering for taxpayers and state and local policymakers. Greater consideration of the proposal’s legality and risk are needed before any further action is taken.”

On June 17th, bobagain briefly interviewed Metro Council Chair Adam Duininck about an apparent \$300 million funding shortfall for SWLRT. Both that interview, and a June 8th presentation to the Metro Council’s Transportation Committee on the alternative financing plan being challenged by Chair Kelly, are included in [bobagain’s most recent youtube video, titled “The Met Council Declares Independence from the Governor and the Legislature”](#). At the June 8th presentation the Metro Council’s Chief Financial Officer, Mary Bogie, began by saying she would:

“... talk about how we plan to move forward with the State funding commitment without a commitment from the State.”

Bogie’s alternative plan would get the cash by assigning future tax revenue to investors.

In the June 17th interview, Duininck responded to bobagain’s report that House Speaker Kurt Daubt has said the Legislature will provide no more money for Southwest Light Rail next year. Duininck understood the project would then be \$150 million short of State and Local money, and said:

“So the question is: ‘if the State share doesn’t come through, can we find \$150 million somewhere else?’

Duininck then answered that question:

“And that would be up to us, to do that, either through the Met Council, or through other local

governments that care about this project.”

From all this bobagain offered the following conclusion:

“First, Duininck and the Met Council have obviously, blatantly, abandoned any pretense of doing anything but steamrolling ahead with their current ‘dead-before-departure’ plan. ‘Group-think’ at the Metro Council has become almost a kind of medical condition.

But here’s the real crucial point: In the ‘Lights On’ bill, both our elected Legislature and our elected Governor gave the Met Council a clear direction: no more money for Southwest; stop the current plan. The Council’s obvious determination to just push forward amounts to nothing short of a kind of ‘Declaration of Independenc’.

We the People, and our elected public servants, are being confronted by a rebellion. A group of unelected bureaucrats have decided they are in charge of Minnesota’s Transit future – not our elected Governor and Legislature.

Their slogan? ‘Taxation without Representation!’”

Bobagain has been providing extensive and ongoing coverage of the SWLRT project at his web site, www.bobagain.com – and on his youtube “bobagain channel” (enter “bobagain channel” in the youtube search box). Recent news releases, and links to associated videos, are available at www.bobagain.com

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