

NEWS RELEASE: Metro Council approves new round of Municipal Consent Hearings; Availability of Federal Funding appears unclear if Legislature does not provide more money; bobagain and other submit extensive comments as SDEIS comment period ends



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”.

Contact: Bob “Again” Carney Jr: bobagaincarneyjr@gmail.com; cell phone: (612) 812-4867

Visit: www.bobagain.com

Minneapolis 7/24/15 – At last Wednesday’s Met Council meeting, Chair Adam Duinick recounted to the Council a “successful” meeting with a top Federal administrator regarding the problem-plagued Southwest Light Rail project. But Duinick repeatedly avoided a clarifying question from registered lobbyist and “candidate-journalist” Bob “Again” Carney Jr. (bobagain): “is Federal funding contingent on more money from the State Legislature for the project?” Although “conventional media wisdom” appears to be the lead story from the Council’s meeting was their decision to launch another round of Municipal Consent, uncertainty over the prospect for Federal funding appears to be at least an equally important news element of the meeting -- but one that other news reporters present have yet to report on.



Whatever the reason for that might be, it is not Duninick’s unwillingness to talk to other reporters – Duinick was videotaped by bobagain talking with MinnPost’s Peter Callaghan; bobagain also accommodated the Star Tribune’s Janet Moore, who wanted to have a “private” conversation with Duinick. Before walking away from Moore and Duinick, bobagain pointed out “this is a public building”, and said his news coverage included how other news media is covering the story; bobagain made the same point to Callaghan.

A “raw” youtube.com video of bobagain’s efforts to obtain more information about the apparent contingency for Federal funding, titled “[Met Council 7 22 15 meeting, question, is Federal SWLRT Funding contingent on more](#)”

[State money](#)”, is online at the youtube “bobagain channel”.

Late in the Council’s unusually short 7/22/15 meeting, Duininck made this statement, (underline emphasis is added):

“A couple weeks ago, I think this is since I’ve given a report, but I met with the FTA Administrator, to talk to her and her senior staff about Southwest LRT and the tight time line we’re under within the next 18 months. I was joined by Mr. Fuhrmann and Mr. Lamb, who helped set up the meeting, and I can safely report to everyone here it was about as successful as we would hope that it would have been in terms of an outcome. We started by talking about the success of the Green Line, how that’s been open a little over a year now, showed the Administrator a video about the business growth and the vibrancy along the line, and talked to her about the ridership. She was enormously thrilled and impressed with how that’s been working, and then talked about the last few months, that we’ve been working through the challenges of Southwest, and what we foresee the next 18 months to look like. The real challenge for us and our staff and the project office is ‘how do we work through the environmental process very quickly, and then move from where we are in the Federal process into the engineering, be accepted into engineering and be awarded a full funding grant agreement in a very compressed timeline?’ And what I can again report back to everybody is the FTA is very supportive of this project, really understands the value of it, wants to do everything they can to work with us, to make sure we stay on that timeline. They understand the sensitivities of it, they know that we have a Legislative Session that we have to work through, and secure the remaining funds, but they basically said ‘if you’re able to get those funds, we’ll definitely on our end be able to help deliver at the technical staff level the environmental and engineering pieces of the process, to put the project in a position to succeed.’ So that was, I think and I think Mark would agree with me, about as successful of a meeting as we could hope for with the Administrator, and she was very happy to spend just about an hour with us, talking about Southwest. So it was a great meeting. I wanted to give you that update.”

In the 2015 Session, the State Legislature cancelled about \$30 million that had been appropriated for Southwest Light Rail, leaving the total appropriated for the project at about \$15 million. The financial plan for the project has always been based on the assumption that the State would contribute a total of ten percent of the project’s cost – this would be \$165 million, based on the \$1.65 billion baseline the Met Council recently tried to cut back to. Using that \$1.65 billion baseline, the State is currently \$150 million short of providing ten percent for the project. At the recent Special Session, House Speaker Kurt Daubt confirmed to this journalist the Legislature would not provide any more money for Southwest Light Rail in 2016.

State House Transportation Chair Tim Kelly (R-Redwing) recently wrote the Met Council, stating his concerns about their recent consideration of a plan to finance \$150 million that will apparently not be provided by the

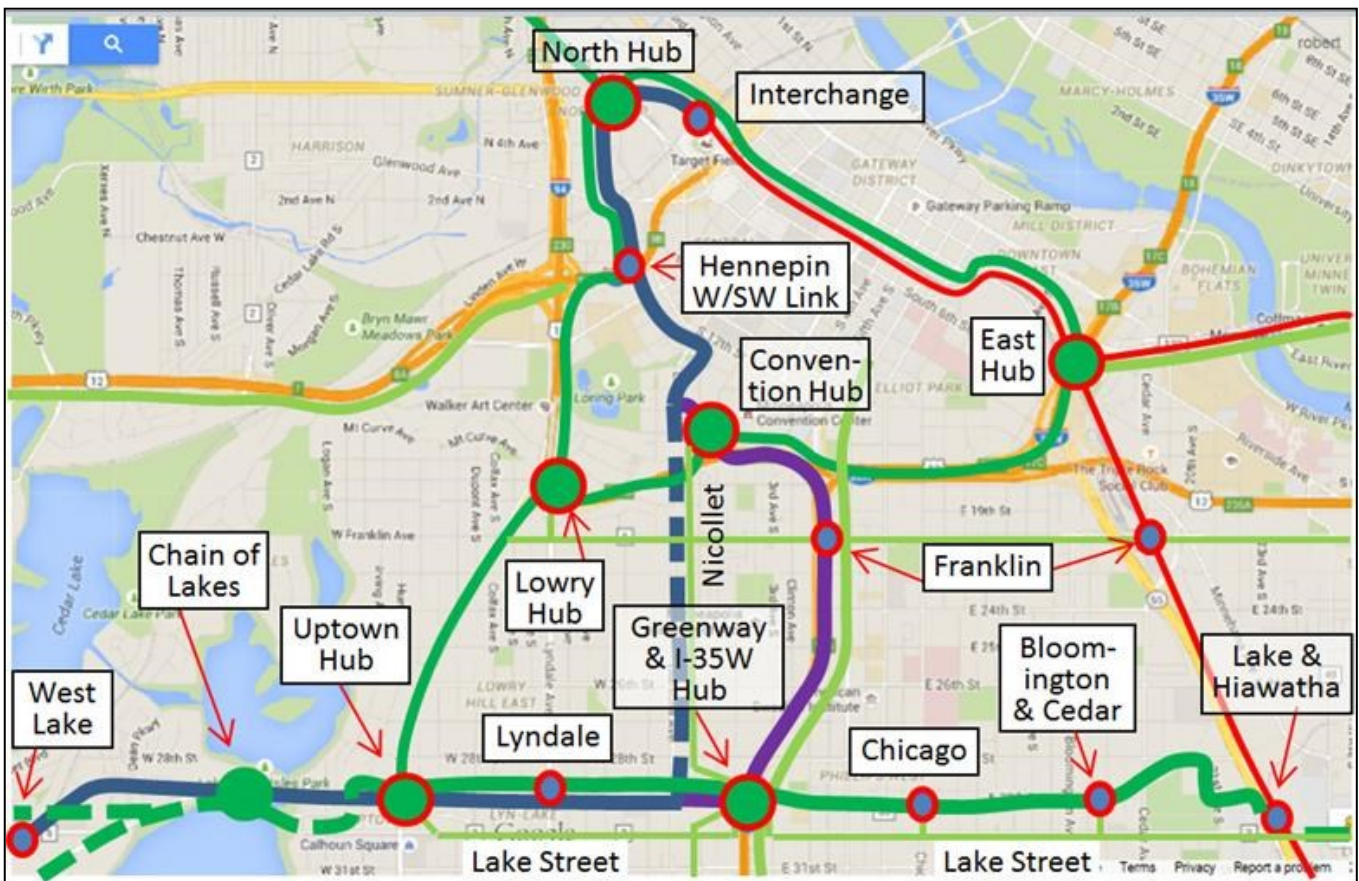
State, using “certificates of participation” – a kind of tax anticipation bond. Kelly questions whether that financing plan would be legal.

Based on this background, bobagain took Duininck’s statement, above, as indicating that Federal support, and funding, for the Southwest LRT project is contingent on the Legislature’s willingness to provide the additional \$150 million. Although bobagain repeatedly attempted to verify this with Duininck, Duininck was unwilling to say anything to bobagain about it.

Clarification of this issue appears to be essential. If the Federal funding will not be available, the current plan is obviously dead. And if Federal funding is contingent on more State money, it therefore appears clearly to follow that the project is dead.

SDEIS Public Comment Period ends

The Southwest LRT Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Comment period ended Tuesday, July 21st, with extensive comments submitted by LRT Done Right, bobagain, Susu Jeffrey, and presumably others. A graphic illustration of a modified “3C” Alignment, the core content of bobagain’s 10,500 word Public Comment, is shown below.



<end>