

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: DOWNTOWN STREETCAR ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS STUDY,
Authorization for application to and acceptance of a grant of up to \$780,000 from the Federal Transit Administration and any available matching funds from public sources (Economic Development Administrator).

REPORT:1459-14

ADVICE: Approval

BACKGROUND

The South Central Regional Council of Governments completed a streetcar assessment for the City of New Haven in 2008. The City continued this work with a Concept Plan and Preliminary Alignment Study in 2011. As part of the 2011 study, City and State officials briefed the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on the project and expressed interest in continuing this project as a transportation and economic enhancement for Downtown New Haven.

The next step in the FTA process is an Alternatives Analysis Study to assist potential sponsors of this future federally-funded transit project in the evaluation of all reasonable modal and multi-modal alternatives and general alignment options, and to address the transportation needs in a defined travel corridor.

In June, 2011, the FTA announced the availability of FY12 discretionary funding for such studies to be awarded on a competitive basis. At the time the Economic Development Administrator submitted to the Board of Aldermen a request to apply for up to \$800,000 in federal funding where the local share match would be \$200,000 using city capital funds as available and/or state transportation planning funds. Although the Commission and Aldermanic Committee gave favorable reports to the Board, the full Board voted not to allow the application to be submitted as it believed City funds should not be used for such a Study at a time when the economy was in a downturn.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The new petition to the Board states “the City proposes to use a portion of its future capital allocation or regional transportation fund as may be available to move this project forward.” The City is now in discussions with the CT Department of Transportation in regard to the \$200,000 local match, and the Economic Development Administrator believes there will be a finance plan acceptable to the Board of Aldermen.

The proposed starter alignment for the streetcar spans approximately one and a half miles mainly through Downtown New Haven. Although an exact alignment will not be determined until after the study is complete, the general area is home to more than 56,700 residents, and its population density compares favorably to the population densities around streetcar alignments that are either in operation or have received Federal funding. There is an active base of pedestrians and bicyclists as more residents live closer to work. The study area is also home to a growing regional economic center. The market consists of approximately 2.8 million square feet of commercial office space. The vacancy rate stands at just 12.6%, well below the national average. It includes some of the largest employers in the region and approximately 75% of the 78,000 jobs in New Haven.

The New Haven Streetcar is intended to connect communities through more public transportation choices, grow the local and regional economy, and contribute to thriving neighborhoods through sustainable investment in transit. Downtown New Haven is a central hub for local and regional transit services, but it lacks a seamless, highly visible connection between transportation hubs and Downtown activity centers that are beyond walking range.


Besides promoting economic growth, transit helps neighborhoods thrive by giving community members an alternative to automobile ownership and use. Approximately 29% of all New Haven residents do not have access to a private automobile. Transit helps protect the environment and improve neighborhood livability by diverting cars from our city streets and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Neighborhoods with transit preserve mobility, encourage walking, support higher property values, and promote overall public health.

Streetcars are now proposed or in operation in cities across the country as they serve as a catalyst for job and tax base growth, as well as an environmentally sound transportation method. Operating on electricity, they do not pollute as other diesel and gas powered vehicles do. New Haven must continue to surge in its highly positive environmental trends (i.e. highest number of LEED certified buildings and highest percentage of walk and bike commuters) in order to stay in the forefront of attracting investment and jobs.

ADVICE

The Commission continues to believe the grant application for the Study is in the best interest of the City and recommends approval.

ADOPTED: December, 21, 2011
Edward Mattison
Chair

ATTEST: 
Karyn M. Gilyang, AIA
Executive Director