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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Robert J. Bauman
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\$300 Million Guided Bus System Is Not The Only Option Available To Capture Needed Federal Funds

Downtown Alderman, Robert Bauman, Points to Other, Less Costly Alternatives

While the Milwaukee Common Council should work to ensure that \$91.5 million in federal funds reserved for public transportation improvements are invested in Milwaukee, it doesn't follow that the only alternative is a risky \$300 million guided bus system that will require local governments to find a minimum of \$60 million to fund the local share of construction costs, Ald. Robert Bauman said today.

"It makes no sense to spend \$60 million in scarce local resources to capture \$91.5 million in federal resources when the result is a guided bus system that reduces the quality of transit service over the routes that it will operate and does nothing to connect low-income and minority communities to areas of job growth in the outlying areas of Milwaukee County and the suburbs," Ald. Bauman said.

"Less costly alternatives exist that would still enable Milwaukee to realize the benefit of the \$91.5 million in federal funds," said Ald. Bauman, who chairs the Common Council's Public Works Committee.

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Guided Bus System Not The Only Option/ADD ONE

According to Ald. Bauman, consultants for the Milwaukee Connector Project are also recommending a far less costly 13-mile bus rapid transit system that will cost about half as much as the guided bus system yet will provide the same level of service as the guided bus system over the same routes. This alternative – which would cost \$157 million to build with a local share of \$26 million – would operate modern buses that use alternative hybrid fuel technology but does not require rails in the street or overhead wires. Moreover, there is no question that these buses will operate in snow and ice conditions – not the case with the guided bus system, the alderman said.

As an additional alternative, Ald. Bauman said the \$91.5 million could be used to fund a portion of the construction of a commuter rail system that includes the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee route as well as extensions of this service through Milwaukee along the existing 30th Street Rail Corridor and along the existing rail line that serves Miller Park, the Veterans Center, State Fair Park and the Milwaukee County Zoo. The cost to implement the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail line is \$152 million, he said.

“That is about half the cost of the guided bus system – a significant savings,” said Ald. Bauman. “This option also offers new service that will actually connect central city neighborhoods with outlying areas of the metropolitan area.”

How feasible would the commuter rail option be? Ald. Bauman said that the commuter rail alternative has advanced farther along the road to implementation. “The Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Study has already chosen a locally preferred alternative and is entering the preliminary engineering phase,” the alderman said, noting that a multi-county regional transportation authority has already been established to develop funding sources for commuter rail. The City of Milwaukee’s Director of Administration, Sharon Robinson, serves on this authority.

In contrast, the Milwaukee County Transit System, which would probably operate the guided bus system, is struggling to maintain funding to operate its existing routes and faces additional cutbacks in existing service because county property taxes are used to fund a portion of the transit system’s operating costs, Ald. Bauman said.

A Common Council resolution endorsing the \$300 million guided bus system is scheduled to be heard before the council’s Steering and Rules Committee on April 27, 2006.