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UP FRONT

## Milwaukee's next streetcar extension leads to new arena

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The next extension of the downtown Milwaukee streetcar will run along North Fourth Street, linking a major new development on West Wisconsin Avenue, the downtown convention center and the new arena.

The city is applying for an estimated \$20 million federal grant to pay for the streetcar extension, said Ghassan Korban, Milwaukee Department of Public Works commissioner.

The route would run on North Fourth and possibly North Fifth streets between West St. Paul Avenue and West Highland Avenue, linking several major development initiatives.

“The goal is to interface this route with future development and create synergy,” Korban said.

It would be the next major line of the streetcar, which will open its downtown loop for passenger service in fall 2018. A spur to the lakefront would



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Rendering of the Milwaukee streetcar to be manufactured by Brookville Equipment Corp.

2019.

If the city can secure the federal grant this year, the Fourth Street line could start service in 2020, Korban said. The Fourth Street line already is 30 percent engineered, Korban said, and has part of the necessary federal plan approvals.

“We are taking advantage of the readiness of this extension,” Korban said. “It is shovel-ready and it helps us keep the momentum going.”

The city has asked businesses along the route to support the streetcar extension. The owners of The Shops of Grand Avenue are “huge supporters” and wrote a letter to support the grant application, said Tony Janow, principal of Grand Avenue co-owner The Aggero Group.

The route’s northern tip is at the main entrance to the new Milwaukee Bucks arena that will break ground this summer. A station is planned at Wisconsin Avenue, Korban said, serving a prospective redevelopment of the city’s parking lot between North Fourth and North Fifth streets.

The Milwaukee Department of City Development this spring confirmed conversations with companies that are looking at projects on the city-owned parking lot at North Fourth Street and West Wisconsin Avenue. That site could support a mixed-use project with sidewalk-level retail and upper floors with housing, offices or hotel rooms.

If the city can secure a large development at its Fourth and Wisconsin Avenue property, that could raise city funding for the streetcar extension. The extension would cost \$30 million to \$40 million, Korban said. He said Milwaukee’s Common Council this year will be asked to dedicate city money to fill out the project budget. The more money the city contributes, he said, the more competitive the federal grant application will be.

Through a tax incremental financing district, the city could borrow money to pay for the streetcar, and pay it off using new property taxes generated by a development at the parking lot at Fourth and Wisconsin. It financed portions of the streetcar’s first phase and the loop to the lakefront the same way.

“That conversation will take place eventually,” Korban said about a TIF district for the extension. “It’s a natural conversation to have.”

The federal grant money would come through the competitive Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER, program that also funded the streetcar’s lakefront spur. There is \$500 million available through TIGER this year, and awards are expected to be announced in September.

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