



Americans for Prosperity joins Milwaukee streetcar opposition

Fight to halt streetcar project in Milwaukee gains more support

By **Larry Sandler** of the Journal Sentinel
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A second major conservative organization has signed on to Ald. Bob Donovan's campaign to stop the planned Milwaukee streetcar.

At a City Hall news conference Thursday, Americans for Prosperity state director Luke Hilgemann said his organization has set up a website, www.astreetcarnameddisaster.com, with an online petition opposing the streetcar. The group, co-founded by oil billionaires Charles and David Koch, is instrumental in the tea party movement.

The **\$64.6 million project** would link the lower east side to the downtown Amtrak-Greyhound station with modern streetcars, which resemble light rail vehicles. The state Public Service Commission is considering whether the city or utilities would have to pay for **moving underground utility lines** out of the streetcar's way, a cost the companies have estimated at more than \$55 million.

Donovan wants the project to be put to a referendum, an idea the Common Council already has rejected. He also wants the city to spend \$54.9 million in federal transit aid on street repairs instead of on the streetcar, although federal and local officials have repeatedly said it would take an act of Congress to redirect the money.

The south side alderman said the online petition would supplement some 3,000 signatures from city residents. He said suburbanites could sign, too, because their tax dollars are part of the federal funds for the project, and because they could end up paying for the streetcar through their utility bills. The West Allis Common Council voted in July to oppose the streetcar if any costs are passed on to utility customers.

Also opposing the streetcar is the MacIver Institute for Public Policy, whose president, Brett Healy, sought the PSC ruling. The institute commissioned a

study critical of the project by Randal O'Toole, a Cato Institute scholar who has written numerous books and papers opposing rail transit.

Jeff Fleming, spokesman for the Department of City Development, issued a written statement defending the streetcar's economic benefits and slamming Donovan, saying, "We never hear Ald. Donovan complain about his Republican friends cutting Milwaukee's local road aids, our recycling aids or our state shared revenue, which funds police and firefighters. The alderman is so tight with groups and individuals who love gutting and kicking Milwaukee, you have to wonder where his loyalties are."

Americans for Prosperity and the MacIver Institute spent heavily to tout Republican Gov. Scott Walker's policies in ads during the run-up to the June 5 recall election. Walker defeated Democratic Mayor Tom Barrett in that race and the 2010 gubernatorial election. Barrett is the chief proponent of the streetcar, which Walker opposed when he was Milwaukee County executive.