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Milwaukee can't pass off operational costs of streetcar

MADISON, Wis. – City of Milwaukee leadership has voiced its desire to explore the possibility of the Milwaukee County Transit System operating Mayor Tom Barrett's proposed \$124 million streetcar project in the downtown area.

But Barrett has indicated that all operational costs will remain a city responsibility and not be shifted to the county.

A budget motion approved today by the Joint Finance Committee ensures just that.

The budget motion request, submitted by state Rep. Joe Sanfelippo, R-New Berlin, prevents the city from passing off any of the costs to operate the streetcar to taxpayers countywide.

"If the city is going to build this questionable streetcar line that's in an area already served by public buses, taxpayers in the suburbs of Milwaukee County should not be left holding the tab," Sanfelippo said. "City leaders seem to think the streetcar will be a tremendous boon to Milwaukee, so I don't see why they would have any problem sticking to their plan of bearing all the costs."

Barrett told the [Milwaukee Business Journal in 2011](#) the city only would rely on private contributions and city parking fund revenues to operate the streetcar.

But Milwaukee government officials already have a history of trying to make taxpayers outside of the city foot portions of the bill.

The city sued the Public Service Commission after the state panel determined in August that Milwaukee taxpayers – and not ratepayers outside city limits – are responsible for covering the costs of moving the utilities along the 2.1-mile route. Those relocations costs are estimated at \$20 million.

"I've heard from my constituents in Milwaukee County and they don't want to pay for a trolley outside of their area that's going to travel in a circle in downtown Milwaukee," Sanfelippo said.

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