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Equity Factor 

Detroit Is Taking the Lead in the Community Benefits Movement

BY ALEXIS STEPHENS | MARCH 10, 2015

Detroit is looking to become the first city in the country to require that developers **invite community members to the table** when negotiating megaprojects. City council is looking to pass a community benefit agreements ordinance in the next few weeks.

For new projects with an investment of at least \$15 million, expansions or renovations of at least \$3 million, or projects seeking at least \$300,000 in public tax subsidies, developers would have to create legally binding documents guaranteeing jobs or quality-of-life protections for the community that is going to be impacted by the development.

Rashida Tlaib first advocated for mandated CBAs while serving as a Michigan State Rep. Since leaving office in January, she's been fighting **opposition to such an ordinance** as the community partnerships and development director for the Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice. I spoke to Tlaib about what impact this could have on Detroit and for other cities that might take their lead.

When did you first start thinking about a community benefit agreements ordinance for Detroit?

I want to say, eight or nine years ago with the announcement of **a new international bridge** crossing into Canada. That's the first time I started hearing the words "community benefits agreement." A billion-dollar, massive transportation project that was going to be landed in one of the poorest, most challenging neighborhoods, Delray. Many of the community residents had recognized that saying no to the projects wasn't working anymore and trying to get a seat at the table would be a better option.

Our public resources and our land in the city of Detroit is extremely precious. As we move forward —

knowing that our politicians come and go — how do we make sure that there's an embedded process no matter who the leadership, no matter who is elected, that there is this process within that always has the community be part of those discussions?

Which benefits are you hoping CBAs will guarantee?

Jobs are obviously at the heart of conversation. But, I hear people talking about air quality, crime and public safety. Can the stadiums explore their public safety and policing beyond the hockey stadium?

Every time I think about a community benefits agreement for the bridge specifically, I think about it being a model bridge that is going to have an air quality program or a volunteer program to get trucks retrofitted. One of the things I heard residents ask is, “Rashida, for the money that they're getting for the land, could they get bus covers?” Those are the kinds of basic needs that a community who is going to have large transportation pressures are thinking about.

The problem though, is that people think that we're actually asking for swimming pools and golf courses when we're not.

What are your hopes for the next steps of getting the ordinance passed?

It sounds like in the next few weeks, we're going to have some movement on it. According to Council President [Brenda] Jones' office, we will pass an ordinance that will be current law in the city of Detroit for various projects, depending on the triggers.

Do you hope that the fight for a citywide ordinance in Detroit will empower other cities to follow your lead?

Absolutely, I think there's already this national movement going on with communities creating the movement and getting their city council members to use it as leverage. What I've found nationally is there seems to be more pull from various community folks. You see it in San Francisco, you see it in [Pittsburgh](#), and we've seen it happen and be extremely successful.

We could have gotten a community benefits agreement with the [hockey stadium](#). There were three votes that went before city council. They could have decided to set aside that vote until that mega-billion-dollar company agreed for a community benefits agreement and negotiated for a community benefits agreement with the residents and the host community and neighborhood, and they did not do that.

We are embedding it into a Detroit ordinance, [because] I think it was just critical. I think Council President Jones hit it on the head when she said, ‘Look, when I'm gone, I want something in place so we're not always relying on trying to reeducate people that are coming into office.’

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Equity Factor is made possible with the support of the [Surdna Foundation](#).

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The  Works

"I Want LRT, Not BRT," Says Suburban Perth Mayor

BY SANDY SMITH | MARCH 10, 2015

Our weekly "New Starts" roundup of new and newsworthy transportation projects worldwide.

Proposal to Replace LRT With BRT Draws Fire

The state government in Western Australia sought re-election on a platform that included a promise to build a 22-km, A\$2.5 billion (\$1.92 billion U.S.) light-rail line that would run from Balga, a northern suburb of the state capital of Perth, into the city center before splitting into branches serving Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre and the Causeway.

Now that government, headed by State Premier Colin Barnett, is proposing replacing that project with a bus rapid transit line instead, and that has at least one local official upset.

The Perth *Sunday Times' Perth Now* site [reports](#) that John Carey, mayor of the near northern suburb of Vincent, blasted Barnett's announcement that the Western Australia Ministry of Transport will instead study the relative merits of both the original light-rail proposal and a BRT line. The cost of the latter would be roughly half that of the light-rail line: A\$1.2 billion (\$962.3 million U.S.)

Barnett defended the move, saying that a BRT system could be upgraded to light rail in the future, but Carey criticized it, calling the move “a lost opportunity for a transitional project. To now turn around, after years of promises, to say, ‘we’ll give you some buses instead,’ just doesn’t cut it.

“You get a major transformation of centers around rail nodes. You won’t get that kind of renewal around a rapid bus transit system.”

Transport Minister Dean Nalder, however, said that in light of both the state government’s worsening finances and the fact that work on the light-rail line, called MAX, had already been deferred until 2017, it would be “irresponsible” not to examine a cheaper alternative. “If we can use buses and deliver the same outcomes [as rail] and do it at half the cost, why wouldn’t we explore it?” Nalder said.

Nalder plans to present a business model to the state cabinet next year.

Chicagoans Mull Return of Streetcars

The last of Chicago’s “Green Hornet” PCC streetcars pulled into the carbarn for the last time in 1958. Now, the Chicago *Gazette* [reports](#), a local advocacy group has launched a study to make a case for bringing streetcars back to the Windy City.

The [Chicago Streetcar Development](#) is proposing a six-mile streetcar route that has dubbed the Superloop. The route would proceed south to Grant Park, and also proposes a loop around the lake; the starter line



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The proposed Superloop would connect a number of popular local attractions not directly served by public transit now, including the Shedd Aquarium, Adler Planetarium, Field Museum, Northerly Island, and the planned Lucas Museum.

Grant Park Conservancy President Bob O’Neill, whose group is working with CSR on the proposal, said, “Moving all these people, local residents and tourists, around the downtown area with light rail is a really clean way of doing it. It’s also pretty unobtrusive. It’s quiet and less polluting, and it prevents the bunching of buses.”

But it would also be pretty expensive: CSR estimates that the Superloop would cost \$350 million to build. That works out to about \$57 million per mile; by comparison, a [BRT line the city plans to build](#) along Ashland Avenue will cost about \$9.9 million per mile. CSR argues that greater passenger capacity and lower operating and maintenance costs make the streetcar a superior choice nonetheless. The group’s study aims to assess all of the economic impacts of the proposed line.

Second Metro Line Opens in Warsaw

Sunday, March 8th saw the inauguration of service on the initial 6.5-km section of Line M2, Warsaw’s second metro line, with a day of free rides on the route, according to [an item](#) in the *International*

Railway Journal.

The east-west line runs under the Vistula River and connects Dworzek Wileński, east of the city center, with Rondo Daszyńskiego on the city's west side. The line connects with the existing Line M1 at Świętokrzyska; the new M2 station there is the deepest on the Warsaw Metro, 23 meters below the street.

The opening of Line M2 took place a year later than had been planned. An Associated Press [story](#) noted that construction was delayed because of the discovery of unexploded World War II munitions and a water leak that flooded a nearly completed station. The project was completed in five years at a cost of 4.2 billion zlotys (\$1.1 billion U.S.)

The city of Warsaw sought bids last fall for the next phase, which will extend the line to the east and the west in segments totaling 6.5 km in length. The 4-billion-zloty (\$1.05 billion U.S.) extensions are scheduled to go into service in 2019.

Know of a project that should be featured in this column? Tweet @MarketStEI using the hashtag #newstarts.

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Philadelphia freelance writer Sandy Smith runs the [Philly Living Blog](#) for Noah Ostroff & Associates, a Philadelphia real estate brokerage. A veteran journalist with nearly 40 years' experience, Smith writes extensively on transportation, development and urban issues for several media outlets,

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INFRASTRUCTURE

NYC's Taxi Driver Test Drops Geography Questions

BY JENN STANLEY | MARCH 9, 2015

Technology has certainly changed the way people move around cities. If you don't know where you're going, you look up real-time directions on your smartphone. Need a ride uptown? Just tap your Uber app. Some municipalities are even exploring **apps** that would support the taxi industry upended by the likes of Uber.

But how does a city incentivize would-be drivers to choose a career with a traditional taxi service rather than a flexible and potentially more lucrative career with a “ride-share” company?

New York, for one, recently started **limiting the number of geography-related questions** on its required test for drivers of the city's yellow cabs. Allan Fromberg, a spokesman from the Taxi and Limousine Commission told the *New York Times* that GPS technology has a lot to do with the change, but many industry experts suspect that growing “sharing economy” threat played a part in the test's makeover.

Some New Yorkers are worried that cab drivers will not be able to safely navigate the city if their only geographical knowledge comes from a GPS, but Fromberg says this criticism is unfair. “The chance that a licensed cab driver is not going to know where major tourist attractions are is slim to none,” he told the *Times*.

Meanwhile, across the pond, standards for new cab drivers are being *raised*. *The Leicester Mercury* recently **reported** that those taking the area's already daunting geography test will soon be expected to know an additional 135 streets and about 40 more places.

Mike Broster, Leicester City Council's head of regulatory services, told the *Mercury*, “people ask why we even need a test when there are sat navs but not everybody uses them and they do not always work or take the most direct route.”

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