

Green Party statement on NAACP Streetcar Petition

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The Southwest Ohio Green Party supports the Cincinnati NAACP's petition to require that any city investments in rail transit systems be put to a public vote. Local Greens emphasized that they do support expanded mass transit options, but that they think citizens should be able to make the final decision on such major investments. Green Party members also questioned whether City Council's streetcar plan is the best approach to improving transit and whether it's appropriate to prioritize it over other spending.

Justin Jeffre, the Greens' 2007 City Council candidate, said, "This petition doesn't mean that there could never be a streetcar. It would simply mean that it must be put up for a vote to make sure that the public supports it. The public deserves to hear all the facts on issues that will impact us for decades to come. By having a debate, we hope that people will learn more about our current transportation system, improve it in whichever way makes the most sense, and ultimately use public transit more. That way everybody wins!"

Southwest Ohio Green Party Convener Josh Krekeler added, "I'm glad to see some long-term thinking from City Council, but I'm dismayed that they're continuing to ignore more important obligations. How can Council commit millions of dollars to a speculative new project, but claim they can't afford to keep city pools and health clinics open, reserve 1.5% of the budget for social services, or fully honor their contracts with retired city employees? They should take care of things that have a more immediate impact on people's well-being first."

Acknowledging that improving public transit will be important to Cincinnati's long-term success, Krekeler continued, "City Council should take a step back, present a fair comparison of a range of mass transit plans, and let the people decide through an open and democratic process which one, if any, to pursue. We'd like to see how streetcars would compare to cheaper, innovative alternatives like grease-fueled trolleys that could attract national attention without as much financial risk. Council should ask the residents in Over-the-Rhine and lower Clifton what they actually need and show what transit system improvements could effectively meet those needs. The plan they're pushing feels a lot like the county's stadium deal, which we're still paying for today. Starting with a more inclusive decision-making process will lead to stronger public support for their projects."

The Green Party looks forward to helping the Cincinnati NAACP's continued efforts to strengthen citizens' voices through this petition, and hopes that the campaign will stimulate a broad public debate on the future shape of mass transit in the city.