



WASTE REPORT for February 29, 2016

A Streetcar Called Waste

Last week the District of Columbia finally opened its calamitous streetcar to the public, years behind schedule and at a cost of \$200 million.¹ Thankfully, despite repeated attempts to get federal funds, the DC streetcar was built without federal taxpayer assistance. But not to worry, with this kind of boondoggle right in the Federal Government's back yard, Uncle Sam still found a way to waste your tax dollars.

D.C.'s District Department of Transportation was unsuccessful in getting federal dollars for the 2.2 mile line (of a whopping 37 mile plan) that opened last week, however, they did receive about **\$1.6 million from Uncle Sam to study expansion of the line in either direction**. What makes this even more mindboggling is that the Federal Government awarded these grants in 2010 and 2012, when just the initial leg of the system had glaring signs of trouble.²

Only the Federal Government would shy away from investing in a troubled venture, while at the same time providing funding to help expand the same troubled venture. Lest you think it was two separate arms of the behemoth federal government not knowing what the other was doing, it was not. The same U.S. Department of Transportation that said "no" with one hand was cutting checks with the other.

While streetcars are the current transportation fad, one must wonder why D.C. needs one in the first place. Some cities that lack rail transit systems have turned to streetcars, but D.C.'s streetcar overlays its existing subways system, the Metro, which boasts approximately 40 stops within the district's boundaries (the Metro goes on to service VA and MD).³

While the Federal Government was contributing to potential expansion of the streetcar above ground, serious safety issues were mounting literally under its feet. Uncle Sam first put money toward streetcar expansion just a year after the Metro's Fort Totten crash which killed six and injured 70. And, as was noted in a *Washingtonian* exposé last year, Metro suffers from systemic safety problems which continue today.⁴

\$1.6 million could have been better used for Metro instead of expanding an already troubled and unneeded streetcar. And, while it is not the federal taxpayer's responsibility to fix Metro, Uncle Sam ponied up \$150 million to the troubled system in last year's omnibus appropriations.⁵

¹ Laris, Michael; *Fourth mayor's the charm? Bowser sets D.C. streetcar grand opening for Feb. 27*, Washington Post, Washington, DC. February 2016.

² *Historic Anacostia Streetcar NEPA*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Grant Number [DC-95-X010-01](#). & Lisle, John; *DC Streetcar Awarded Federal Grant to Study K Street Alternatives*; DC Streetcar, Washington, DC. Press Release December 2010

³ <http://www.wmata.com/rail/maps/map.cfm>

⁴ Mullins, Luke and Gaynor, Michael; *The Infuriating History of How Metro Got So Bad*; Washingtonian; Washington, DC. December 2015

⁵ Laing, Kieth; *Spending bill restores DC Metro funding to \$150M*, The Hill; Washington, DC; December 2015