

Former baseball great Yogi Berra once said, “It’s déjà vu all over again.”

Once again, we are having a debate over a multi-million-dollar rail line.

Here are six reasons why we shouldn’t approve the latest version - the Downtown Connector:

**It costs too much:** \$300 million is a conservative estimate. Routinely, systems in other areas cost far more than original projections. Plus, the federal government is overwhelmed with requests for new systems so the share from the feds is likely to drop (as it has in other areas). Even with \$91.5 million from years ago, the local share will still be significantly large.

**It costs more in the future, too:** A memo from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce (supportive of the system) staff shows that the system will cost \$2.4 million more per year. And they use optimistic figures.

**It will hurt bus riders:** While downtown riders will get a fancy new system, the increased cost of the system will force cuts in other parts of the transit system. At a time when the county budget is tight (\$80 million gap for 2007), adding to the costs will hurt regular transit users.

**It will hurt tourism:** Funding for both the local share of the capital costs and the annual operating costs would have to come from a new or increased fee or tax. Increases in the hotel tax and car rental fee would be likely targets. This would drive them up to some of the highest in the country. In addition, many suggest that those revenues should go – instead - to finishing the Midwest Airlines Center so it can attract more and larger conventions.

**It detracts from our needs in other parts of the community:** Downtown Milwaukee is booming. Condos and office buildings are popping up all over. A recent report by the Public Policy Forum showed that the rapid growth in value in Milwaukee is largely due to the rapid growth in the downtown area and along the river. The real needs are in other parts of our region and this system takes funds away from investments in those areas.

**It will force an increase in taxes:** Besides the likely hike in the hotel tax and car rental fee, fully funding the system (capital and operating) is likely to require an increase in the sales tax. Milwaukee County already has the highest sales tax in the state. Adding to that burden will only hurt retailers and employers in our area.

A few weeks ago, our family visited Indianapolis. It has a vibrant downtown and we loved it. There are wonderful neighborhoods. They have an unemployment rate of just 4.8%. Clearly, they are one of the most dynamic areas in the country. Yet they don’t have a rail transit system.

When I talk to people about coming to our region, they don’t ask about a rail transit system. They want to know about things like jobs, schools, taxes, health care and attractions.

We have an outstanding community.

We’re home to numerous Fortune 500 companies. We have an amazing lakefront, awesome attractions, vibrant arts and entertainment, professional sports, vast parkland, wonderful institutions of higher learning and so many more advantages. We have all of the excitement of a “big city” with the hospitality of a “small town.”

Yet, we need to stop worrying about adding a new gimmick and – instead – focus on selling the assets that Milwaukee and our region great! It is time to stop fighting old battles and move on to the things that will really help this region.