

Item 23-1011: Request to approve Wisconsin Department of Transportation Signals and ITS Standalone Program Grant Application in the amount of \$220,750

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Aug 21, 2023, 4:30PM

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:07

Our first action item this evening is 23-1011 the request to approve the Wisconsin Department of Transit Signals and ITS standalone program grant application in the amount of \$220,000—\$220,750. Do we have a motion?

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 01:28

Move for approval.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 01:29

Second.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:30

We have a motion and a second. Any discussion? Questions? Alder Hartzheim?

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 01:38

Thank you, chair. Since this is—since Siemens is seeming to be a problem for many people, what would be our—what's our risk during the time between applying and hopefully getting this grant and actual change? The change to—

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:59

Could you just clarify. You said "This is a problem"; you think you could just clarify what problem?

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 02:04

Well, since Siemens is the vendor that seems to be the issue with the existing traffic control in the city, what is—do we have an emergency plan should Siemens' stuff just die for us?

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 02:20

Thank you. Um Director Block? Okay, Engineer Lom.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 02:28

You've struck right at the core of the issue with this. So, this is—the way I like to describe this is if you had an old laptop that was running Windows 7 in the background, and it might chug along for five more years, and it might die tomorrow. And at that point, you're just probably buying a new laptop, except that this is a lot more important.

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 02:50

So, the downside risk here that we're trying to deal with is that we are seeing a steady decline in the service that we're getting from our current provider, and the the—what that could create for us is if we lose—if that centralized control system breaks down, we would be—it would not turn the city into mass chaos but what it would do is create a ton of work at the administrative level for us. Right now, we're able to do all of our signal programming and changes and everything remotely. That would be sending a person out to every signal to do all

this work independently. It also would preclude the ability to do some of the functionalities that allow the signals to coordinate to each other during certain times of the day and things like that.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 03:46

Did that answer your question?

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 03:48

Yes. Thank you.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 03:49

Great. Thank you. Any other questions or discussion? Alder Doran?

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 03:55

Thank you. Question, I guess—well, two questions. First, we talked about sort of some situations that have come up over the most recent few months, I guess. Were there issues under this that—this current contract or situation with Siemens I guess—that have cost the city additional funds to handle because of their, I don't know I guess, if it's a lack of attention in response to correcting issues or things like that?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 04:23

I wouldn't say direct expenses in the form of cutting a check to somebody for something, but it's more so that indirect expense of, you know, calling tech support and spending your entire day on the phone. They send somebody up here. We try to get it fixed. We can't get it fixed. And it's just sort of this never-ending time suck to try and keep it running the way that it needs to run.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 04:52

So, there is a sort of actual cost here both in staff time and obviously translates to dollars to the community and things which sort of leads to the second question, I guess. Is this—maybe I'm just not clear, but are we in a contract with Siemens right now for this work that we have to break in some form or fashion? Or are we free to just move to another vendor?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 05:14

The short version of that is we are free to move to another vendor. We're paying an annual software maintenance fee. So, there's two pieces to this puzzle. You've got the centralized software, which I was just described; we're paying an annual maintenance fee for that. And we have the related hardware that's out in the field at each individual location. All of that needs to be replaced in order to make it work the way we need it to work. So, there is nothing contractually or otherwise, that keeps us from doing that.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 05:45

So that equipment then we'd be looking at replacing, is that city owned equipment? Or do we lease that from Siemens?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 05:51

The hardware is city owned. So, what this grant does is it helps us replace the about 25—20 to 25% of the hardware at a 90% or a 10% city share. And that kind of kicks the project off and allows it—and it also buys the proportionate share of software licenses that we need—that we would need with the new system. And then we would then have to take it from there unless another grant is found.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 06:21

Okay. And it wasn't mentioned here, but I don't know if there's any value then in that hardware that the city would be replacing. Is there value in trying to sell that?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 06:28

Unfortunately, there really isn't. In fact, when the state went this route, they literally gave the hardware that they had to the municipalities. We got what would otherwise have been \$30,000 worth of hardware just for nothing. But one of the things we've tried to do to lessen the impact on that is we have been—we stopped doing the normal replacement of hardware that we do about five years ago in anticipation of this problem. So, all of the hardware that's out there is getting to be fairly old.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 07:11

Okay. Thank you.

Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 07:13

Is the support agreement based on the number of pieces of hardware? Or is it based on the city size? What is it? As we phase—go into the new program can we start lessening the cost of the current agreement?

Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 07:29

The existing agreement is not based—it we just—we pay them a lump sum. That's actually a good question. I don't—our—the way we would like to do this is to let the old—so if we can do this work in 2025, which is what we're requesting, then we would we would do it all at once with the help of that contractor, and then we would never pay another nickel to our existing vendor. The new—whether or not there's an ability to scale that back in those months preceding that, I don't think so, but it's that's worth me double checking with Mike Hardy. The new software is based on the number of controllers or pieces of hardware that are out in the field and there is a big volume discount on that that's described in the memo a little bit.

Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 08:29

Okay. Yeah, if we could look into how that support contract is structured, I think that would be positive. We might be able to get a little bit of savings out of that as we switch over. Any other questions or discussion?

Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 08:45

All right, with that we'll vote all those in favor say aye. Aye. Any opposed? That motion passes five zero.