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Ridership numbers start to add up for proposed trolley

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Village each weekday More than 5,000 people would ride a trolley linking downtown to Mount Vernon and, say proponents of the transit line the Charles Street corridor. That means a total of about 2along million passengers a year, slightly more than half of the total of riders on a **Maryland Transit Administration** bus along the same route.

But while the trolley proposal has gotten positive reception in the community, concerns remain over street parking and the speed of service.

Tourism and business leaders have criticized the lack of public transit in Baltimore, particularly in that central part of the city. Transit lacks links to many cultural and educational institutions, they say. The trolley would help address that, but isn't yet a sure thing.

The proposal has gotten some support from city officials, including \$620,000 for a two-year preliminary study, which just wrapped up its first year. The **Charles Street Development Corp.** has met with community members, sharing the results of the first part of the study, for the past several weeks. Executive Director Kristin Speaker said the response has been positive.

The group estimates \$4.5 million per year in operating costs, the largest chunk of which will be covered by \$1.8 million in fares. The fares haven't been determined but would be on par with MTA bus prices. The city would provide \$1.5 million per year, which would come out of the budget for a downtown circulator the city recently announced would begin in July 2009, Speaker said. One of the routes is similar to the proposed trolley route and would be omitted from the shuttle map, she said.

More money and support could also come from local developers. **Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse Inc.** officials recently floated the possibility of extending a trolley or other public transit system into South Baltimore developments Tide Point and Port Covington. Those plans are still nascent and don't change the current plans for the trolley, but could grow, Speaker said.

The most common questions from residents and other community members have been about slower traffic flow and reduced on-street parking, Speaker said. One transit advocate said he thinks those matters could pose an issue, and it may be a decision between one or the other.

"Think about how narrow Charles Street is up near Saratoga or when you get near Fayette; at five o'clock, it's totally packed, and now you're going to throw a trolley into this?" said Richard Chambers, executive director of One Less Car.

Chambers said he thinks without eliminating some parking lanes, the trolley will run so slow that people won't want to ride it.

Trolley planners estimate the longest trip from Charles Village to the Convention Center at 25 minutes. Engineering decisions such as station location and lane alignment are going to be worked through in the second year of the study.

The trolley is planned to arrive at stops every 10 minutes, meaning traffic disruption at any given intersection will be small, at six times per hour, Speaker said.

Another concern of local residents was that they would have to pay a tax to fund the trolley since it went through their neighborhoods, said Sandy Sparks, a member of the Charles Village Association's board of directors. But the plan as it is only charges businesses and other institutions that would benefit from the trolley, creating a total of \$360,000 per year.

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