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Backers clang bell for fixed-rail trolley

06/13/07

By Adam Bednar

The public will have at least two chances to critique early plans for a trolley line that would run along Charles Street from the Inner Harbor to the Homewood campus of Johns Hopkins University.



A conceptual drawing shows a trolley car in Mount Vernon. Public meetings are scheduled June 21 and 25 on a plan for a Charles Village trolley line.

The Charles Street Development Corp., which is promoting such a line as a tourism draw, will hold two meetings to update the public on the plan and to get input from residents along the Charles Street corridor.

The first meeting is Thursday, June 21, at the Baltimore Convention Center at 6 p.m. The second is June 25 at the Baltimore Museum of Art at 6 p.m.

The trolley would run through the southern part of Baltimore's 14th councilmanic district. It would be a plus for neighborhoods such as Charles Village, Oakenshawe and Roland Park, as well as Hopkins and the BMA, said 14th District Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, a staunch supporter of the project.

Involved in the planning process locally is the Greater Homewood Community Corp., which represents 40 neighborhoods in the area. Its executive director, Karen Stokes of Oakenshawe, serves on the Charles Street Development Corp.'s Community Trolley Steering Committee.

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Stokes said meetings will include simulations of the trolley's route -- a proposed 3.5-mile circuit along Charles and St. Paul streets.

The corporation has been planning the route for several years with businesses, neighborhood associations and cultural organizations. The project could cost up to \$150 million, depending on whether the trolleys would be glorified buses or the more expensive fixed lines on rails, according to a 2004 feasibility study. That decision has not been made.

Supporters, many of them from Baltimore's business community, envision local, state, federal and private financing.

Community leaders have been generally supportive of the idea so far, although some are concerned about the loss of parking spaces to make room for a trolley line and the aesthetics of a fixed track, which would necessitate overhead electrical lines. That would be unsightly, some residents say.

The fixed-rail trolley, which many backers favor, is modeled after a \$56 million, 4.7-mile system in Portland, Ore. The Charles Street Development Corporation hired as its consultant the firm Kittles and Associates, which designed that system.

Baltimore has a history as a trolley town. Beginning in the mid-19th century, public horse-drawn trolley cars were in use.

The city's trolley system's use peaked during World War II but the influx of the automobile and the migration to the suburbs rendered it obsolete. The last trolley made its final run in Baltimore Nov. 3, 1963.

Now, the only place in the area to ride a trolley is at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum on Falls Road south of Hampden.

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