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## Proposed trolley line has steep hill to climb

06/27/07

By Adam Bednar

It will be at least five years, if ever, before a trolley line links the Inner Harbor and Johns Hopkins University's Homewood campus.

The Charles Street Development Corp. outlined its best-case scenario -- breaking ground for the 7.5-mile circuit in 2009 with operations beginning in 2012 -- at two public meetings over the last week, June 21 at the Baltimore Convention Center and June 25 at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

The corporation must raise as much as \$200 million to create a fixed-rail trolley line along Charles and St. Paul streets.

Although most people who went to the meetings liked the idea, some said overhead electrical lines for a fixed-rail trolley would be ugly, and riders could be targets for robbers.

The corporation hopes to finance the project with private and public funds. But its hands are somewhat tied because it has promised not to compete with the state and city for federal transportation aid. And the cost estimate may change. Three years ago, construction expenses were put at \$150 million.

"We need to know if it's \$100 million, which would be great, or if it's \$200 million, which makes it a bit more difficult," said David Funk, chairman of the corporation's trolley committee.

The corporation hopes to build a fixed-rail line rather than use buses made to look like trolleys.

A trolley line would be the most effective mass rail option for the city, said Yolanda Takesian, a transportation analyst for Kittelson & Associates, the design consultant for the project. The company designed a trolley system in Portland, Ore., that's a model for the line proposed for Baltimore.

Installing a trolley line costs less than one-third of what's needed to build a light-rail line, Takesian said, because a trolley can coexist with cars, without separate own rights-of-way, she said.

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Funk foresees a nonprofit organization owning the line and contracting with the Maryland Transit Administration to operate it.

The line, conceptualized by Henry Hagan, chief operating officer of Monumental Life Insurance Co. in downtown Baltimore, is being pitched as a way to revive Charles Street as Baltimore's "main street" and a tourism draw.

Supporting the project are Deputy Mayor Andrew Frank, developer William Struever of Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, the Baltimore Department of Planning, the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association, the Baltimore Development Corp., Johns Hopkins and the Baltimore Museum of Art.

The Board of Estimates approved \$200,000 on June 22 for a feasibility study of the line.

"This is completely consistent with the broader goals of the city," Planning Director Doug McCoach told an audience of 20 at the convention center.

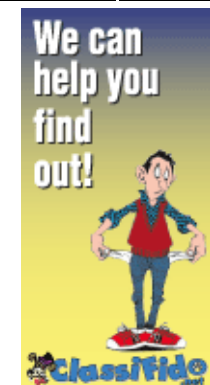
The BMA crowd was much larger, an estimated 70 people, including Daniel Raffel, events coordinator for the restaurant Brasserie Tatin in Tuscan-Canterbury. He said he wishes the line would come even closer to the eatery at 105 West 39th St.

Current plans have the line heading north from Conway Street downtown onto Cathedral Street, crossing Mount Royal Avenue, heading north on Charles Street, crossing University Parkway, looping around at Bishops Lane, heading east on University Parkway, then south on St. Paul Street, crossing at Mount Royal and heading south on Charles back to Conway.

But the project also has detractors, such as husband and wife photographers Greg Pease and Kelly Baumgartner, of Guilford. They worry about crime and say the line should be just for tourists.

"I still think it's the trolley to nowhere," Baumgartner said.

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