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February 01,
2008

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Governor's budget has trolley funds

Money for streetcar study now awaits legislative OK

01/23/08

By Adam Bednar

The Charles Street streetcar proposal is right on track.

Gov. Martin O'Malley's proposed fiscal 2009 budget includes \$400,000 to help supporters plan for the controversial streetcar project.

That is the amount the Charles Street Development Corp. proposed two years ago when it asked the state to help finance the line, corporation spokeswoman Kristin Speaker said. Funds would come from a matching grant from the state Department of Transportation, which gave the corporation \$100,000 for planning in 2007, she said.

Matching funds would come from the Baltimore Development Corp., Baltimore's quasi-public economic development agency, and from the private sector, Speaker said.

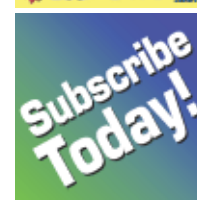
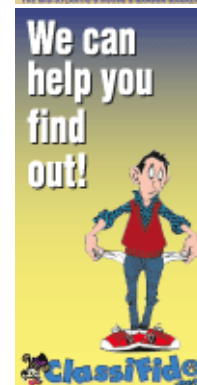
Although the governor has included the full request of \$400,000, the budget still has to be approved by the General Assembly.

Speaker would not speculate as to whether the entire amount would be approved.

"We haven't really gotten to that point yet. We haven't discussed it," Speaker said.

The proposed, fixed-rail streetcar line, which backers estimate will cost \$150 million, is the brainchild of the corporation, which promotes the city and tourism.

Backers say the line would serve as a mass transit option for neighborhoods along the Charles Street corridor and would lure tourists to areas of the city outside the Inner Harbor, including north Baltimore, which is home to the Baltimore Museum of Art and Johns Hopkins University, among other



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institutions.

The 7.5-mile trolley line would run mainly along Charles and St. Paul streets, between the Convention Center and University Parkway.

Currently, the development corporation and affected neighborhoods are mulling proposals for financing the trolley's operating budget, including a surtax on homes within a quarter-mile of the track.

That proposal, a surtax of \$50 for every \$100,000 of assessed property value for private homes, has angered some residents.

The proposed Ed Hopkins, who opposes a trolley line, said the tax is a big issue with homeowners. During meetings of the Charles Street Development Corp.'s Governance and Finance Working Group, neighbors have expressed their displeasure with the tax.

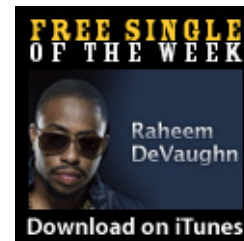
They believe JHU should foot more of the bill because it stands to benefit the most, Hopkins said. "Financing is the kiss of death," said Hopkins, who has a Web site, www.trolleytrouble.org, to air grievances about the proposed line.

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