

Big Easy offers insight into value of trolley travel

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BALTIMORE -

Even though we are blessed to have light rail and what some would call trolley service in Baltimore City, there has been talk about adding more to the mix.

Advocates say trolleys are highly efficient in that they can transport large numbers of people without contributing to the air quality problem — assuming the vehicles are powered by electricity.

They say trolleys will provide a bit of nostalgia because they were a large part of Baltimore's transportation system in the early part of the last century.

Because of all that, I'm in New Orleans for a couple of days to get a firsthand look at this city's trolley system, one of the earliest and longest-running trolley systems in the country.

Yes, I know I could have saved time and money by riding the rails around town, but I also wanted to do a little volunteer work with the good people still trying to clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

My first impression is these trolleys take up a very large amount of space.

They run down the middle of Canal Street in a space that is wide enough for three or even four vehicular travel lanes.

Here is a transportation device that more often than not does not have air conditioning; instead, the windows are wide open in hopes of creating a breeze as the trolley gets up to 15 or 20 mph between stops.

I notice the trolleys are very popular, but with whom?

The looks on the faces of the passengers as they pass certain buildings and sights seem to indicate they are tourists using the trolley to get from one end of Canal Street's business district to another.

More on my experiences here in a column next week.

Examiner