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Trolley could connect campus with Harbor

Board of Estimates approves \$200,000 in funding towards a study to decide if line is possible

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As the University struggles with how to strengthen ties to the community, a literal connection to the rest of Baltimore may soon be arriving in the form of a proposed trolley line that would run from Homewood to the Inner Harbor.

The Board of Estimates approved \$200,000 of funding last June to study the feasibility of creating a proposed seven-and-a-half-mile trolley line along Charles Street. A projected \$800,000 will be used for the study on the logistics of the system.

"Charles Street is a major corridor in our city. The trolley system would increase economic development along this corridor, enhance urban life for residents along this route and be accessible for citizens and tourists to local attractions such as The Walters Art Gallery, The Baltimore Museum of Art and Lyric Opera House," said Comptroller Joan Pratt, who is also a member of the Board of Estimates.

First proposed in June 2005, the idea of a streetcar from the Homewood campus was thought to potentially revitalize the city by serving tourists, cultural destinations and entertainment venues. "Johns Hopkins has contributed in an enormously positive way to the quality of life in Baltimore," said Anthony McCarthy, director of communications for the Mayor.

According to McCarthy, Hopkins has helped in the development of city projects and has been involved in the Renaissance of the Charles Village Community.

For the past three years, the Charles Street Development Corporation has coordinated a study regarding the demand of adding a trolley line along Charles Street to the Inner Harbor.

"It's been a telltale on planning right now for three years," said Ed Myers, senior principal of transportation firm Kittelson & Associates. According to Myers, the firm is still between the planning and engineering stages and will likely begin engineering a year from now. "It's not a done deal yet," he said.

Kittelson & Associates is studying three aspects of the trolley line: ridership, financial feasibility and route. The firm has been at this stage for the past three years and the community involvement in this process has been generally positive, Myers said.

Though the firm knows that the trolley line will use North Charles Street and University Parkway, Kittelson & Associates is still deciding which lane to use for the trolley system.

"Having a trolley system is an idea that has been knocked around the city for decades," McCarthy said. "Mayor Dixon has been extremely interested in gathering bids from companies."

"It's an idea that looks like it's gained a lot of popularity," said David Hill, executive director of the Charles

Village Community Benefits District.

According to Hill, some residents of Charles Village are opposed to the idea of the trolley being independently funded by foundations.

Hill also stated that some residents have also indicated some issues with the implementation of a trolley to the Inner Harbor, mostly citing concerns with the location of the tracks on the road and traffic congestion.

The business communities, such as those on St. Paul and the southern part of North Charles Street near Hopkins, find the trolley system beneficial and attractive. "Trolleys are quaint and attractive, and they would enable the rest of the city to see the sights here," Hill said.

Although the estimation and planning has seemed to be taking a long time, Myers added that this project is not unusually long. Finding funding has been a problem for the firm and has been sporadically funded by street development companies, which means that the line will be both privately and publicly owned.

According to Pratt, the Charles Street Development Corporation received a grant in the amount of \$30,000 from the city and state to study the costs associated with building either a rail or rubber-tire operated trolley system last November. These funds will be used for a third study being conducted, which will take approximately 12 months, Pratt said.

After the study is completed, a full design project of the trolley system will have to be done along with identifying construction and operating costs, as well as funding capital for the streetcar system, according to Pratt.

While she was not aware of the Board of Estimate's actions, Susan Boswell, dean of Student Life, was supportive of the idea. "I think it would be a great idea both for the students and the surrounding community," she said.

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