

## maryland news

# Trolley travel could be in city's future

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If there's a streetcar named desire, Baltimore boosters are hoping to catch a ride on a trolley named development.

An organization charged with revitalizing the Charles Street corridor is studying whether a trolley system, extinct in the city since the 1960s, could be the answer.

The Charles Street Development Corp. is studying the feasibility of installing a 7.5-mile trolley line that would link the [Inner Harbor](#) with the [Johns Hopkins University](#).

It would drop riders at the door of city attractions such as the [Walters Art Museum](#), the [Lyric Opera House](#) and the [Baltimore Museum of Art](#) - sights that most tourists spend days in the city not seeing.

And, the thinking goes, it might even cause developers to take another look at vacant lots in Mount Vernon, closed-down restaurants in the arts district and struggling neighborhoods that surround Penn Station.

"All up and down Charles Street, business would benefit," said Rebecca Gagalis, Charles Street Development Corp.'s executive director. "It would really, really be a huge benefit to small business."





Though the plan is in its infancy, a study has revealed a few things. For instance, a trolley system, depending on the variety, would cost anywhere from \$40 million to \$150 million in capital expenses alone. That money would likely have to come from a combination of public and private sources.

Democratic Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, who has helped funnel federal dollars to area transportation projects, said he is intrigued. He has heard about the success of trolley projects across the country, in cities such as Tampa, San Francisco, New Orleans - and particularly Portland, Ore., where business reportedly boomed in the wake of a downtown trolley installation.

"It could really take Baltimore to a whole 'nother level in regards to development," he said. "I've always believed that Charles Street should be much more vibrant than what it is; [it] has never seemed to get off the ground. I think this kind of venture could help that."

Before taking the trolley plan further, Cummings said, he wants to be certain that it won't conflict with the state's public bus system - for money or ridership.

But those behind the trolley plan and others say that buses, with their noise and diesel fumes, aren't going to get tourists out of the harbor, and bus routes, no matter where they are, don't spark development.

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## Proposed trolley route

(Sun staff)

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"A developer is not going to get excited about a bus, even a nice bus, coming past a project," said Edward J. Myers of Kittelson & Associates, who put together Charles Street Development's trolley analysis.

Portland's streetcar system, which opened in 2001, has become the national model. The city estimates that the \$56.9 million project has generated more than \$1.4 billion in redevelopment. "People asked us, 'Why not do a bus system?'" said Kay Dannen, spokeswoman for Portland Streetcar Inc. "Buses don't attract developers like a light rail does. It's temporary, you can move anytime. Rail shows commitment and investment."

Portland's success inspired Washington to pursue its own streetcar system, which is expected to be completed next year. The district's estimated \$50 million, 2.7-mile line has encountered resistance from residents who worry that the construction and streetcars will worsen traffic congestion rather than alleviate it.

But Washington Transportation Director Dan Tangherlini said that those minor headaches aside, the district will glean undeniable long-term benefits from the streetcars.

"An investment like this," he said, "will send a signal to the development and real estate community, who will respond with their own investments."

## Seeing the potential

Baltimore's local and state business and tourism leaders also see the potential. They're looking at a route that is mostly northbound on Charles and southbound along St. Paul Street north of Mount Royal Avenue and Cathedral Street below. Among the things to be decided is whether the trolleys would operate on rails (the more expensive option) or rubber tires.

To get tourists at the [Inner Harbor](#) onto public transportation, said Nancy Hinds, spokeswoman for the [Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association](#), the vehicle has to look appealing, feel safe and - above all else - be simple.

"When tourists visit a city, they don't have bus schedules," she said. "They want to look for something they can just hop on and get to points a, b, c or d. We want to make it as easy and as convenient as possible."

And though downtown Baltimore is fairly walkable, people won't necessarily want to hoof it to some of the farther-flung neighborhoods, said Downtown Partnership President Kirby Fowler. "Even the fittest tourist in the best of health," he said, "on a hot day, standing at the corner of Charles and Pratt, they just are not going to want to go up that hill."

Dennis Castleman, the state's assistant secretary for tourism, film and the arts, said the trolley can only help. "It might spur more tourism," he said. "If they can find an easier way to get around, they might come back and spend more money."

## Looking northward

Neighborhoods upstream of the [Inner Harbor](#) such as Mount Vernon, Station North and [Charles Village](#) would like to see some of that tourist cash heading their way - and if a trolley moves it along faster, all the better.

The best thing for Mount Vernon, said Steve Johnson, the community association's former president, is to make a destination of its restaurants, galleries and historic streets. "Everything is focused on the [Inner Harbor](#), and people don't seem to know about all

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those things up in our neighborhood," he said.

In [Charles Village](#), people are also excited about the concept, but that enthusiasm, said [Charles Village](#) Association President Beth Bullamore, is tempered with concerns about the plan's details.

With parking already tight there, people worry this might somehow take away spots. They also fear that the construction will seem never-ending, and that the overhead wires will be unattractive, Bullamore said.

However, she added: "My husband just retired, and he's all excited about taking [a trolley] downtown to wander the Barnes & Noble - he's all for that."

Baltimore's once-thriving, citywide trolley line ceased decades ago. Charlie Duff, executive director of the Midtown Development Corporation, rode one of those trolleys on the last day of the system's existence. That was in the early 1960s, and Duff was 9 years old.

He's pleased to see the trolley's potential comeback in Baltimore - albeit on a much smaller scale. Though he knows it won't transform living in the city the way the original system did, he said, he thinks a trolley could breathe life up Charles Street. The cultural attractions along that street, he said, are like pearls looking for a string.

"This," he added, "just might be it."

Sun staff writer William Wan contributed to this article.

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