



## Charles corridor trolley plan gains momentum

June 10, 2005

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Daily Record Business Record

As Baltimore ranks at the top of Frommer's upcoming travel hot spots list, the Charles Street Development Corp. is proposing trolleys to draw the tourists northward from the ever-popular Inner Harbor to the city's lesser-known cultural institutions.

A study released this week examined the feasibility of a streetcar system along the Charles Street corridor, a 7.5-mile roundtrip from the Inner Harbor to the Johns Hopkins University at University Boulevard. Kittelson and Associates Inc. of Portland, Ore., prepared the study, which, through a process that included stakeholder input, resulted in a recommended route and method of transport.

The study took root more than a year ago.

"There is a broad, broad consensus for the need for a circulator," said David Funk, chairman of the Circulator Committee for the Charles Street group.

Funk cited three purposes a streetcar would serve: economic development of the Charles Street corridor; connection of destinations between the two endpoints; and enhancement of urban life for residents along the proposed route.

"Developers are able to better market their project when there's a fun, functional mode of transportation close by," she said.

Funk emphasized the importance of community input during the study process. Political leaders, community organization representatives, business leaders and citizens were invited to participate in stakeholder meetings throughout the initial study process.

"Building community support is critical to this project. This is not going to be imposed on the community from the top down," Funk said.

The feasibility study report recommended a fixed rail system, as opposed to rubber tire trolleys, for several reasons, according to Kittelson and Associates' Senior Principal Edward Myers.

"Historically, fixed rail has done more as an economic development tool" because of its permanence, Myers said. Fixed rail would also impose less air and noise pollution on the neighborhoods affected by the proposed system.

Still, analysts are examining both modes of transportation in the next phase of the study, which includes a detailed economic analysis of both options.



*A trolley system in Portland, Ore., has been deemed a success and is a possible model for one in Baltimore. Such a system would link the Inner Harbor with cultural institutions in the central part of the city, all the way to the Johns Hopkins University.*

Initial estimates found that fixed rail would cost about \$100 million to construct and between \$4.1 million and \$4.6 million annually to operate. Rubber tire trolleys, meanwhile, would cost \$30 million to construct and between \$3.1 million and \$3.5 million to operate.

The study outlined several possible funding methods for the project. One such idea, similar to a partial funding mechanism for the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, would create a business improvement district in which properties adjacent to the project would pay a property tax surcharge. Funding could also come from federal, state and local grants, as well as dollars from selling naming rights.

A proposed rail system would take approximately two years to build, which would be done in segments so the entire corridor would not be disrupted.

Systems in other cities have had significant economic success from implementation of streetcar systems. Tampa, for example has seen between \$600 million and \$800 million economic impact within two blocks of a streetcar system that began operating in October 2002, according to Ed Crawford, a spokesman for the system's operator, Hartline.

"We went from not being a tourist destination at all as far as the downtown area, to being very much of a tourist destination," he said. The proposed Baltimore line would run almost three times longer than the Tampa system.

The concept of trolleys has been greeted with support by community organizations. Lisa Keir, executive director of the Mount Vernon Cultural District, said she does not expect any opposition.

"I think everybody that knows about it at this time is enthusiastic, or at least cautiously optimistic," she said. "It really fulfills a long-time need that the members of our organization have identified."

Political leaders have also welcomed the proposal. Del. Pete Hammen, a Democrat representing the district that encompasses the city's waterfront, is encouraging the advancement of the project, and said he would like to see expansion of trolley lines in future years to accommodate greater access to the waterfront areas.

"There's a lot of interest because there's a lot of folks that work and live in the city that don't necessarily want to have to get in their car and drive a mile and a half to work," he said. "It will bring people from the harbor up this big hill that they look at and they're intimidated, and they may not go up it unless there's some transportation to get them up."

The next step in the study, expected to be completed in the fall, involves undertaking a thorough economic impact study and creating a simulation so residents and stakeholders can actually visualize what a streetcar would look like moving along Charles Street.