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Transit system would cost \$280 million

Streetcar-bus line to serve Great Park, Irvine Spectrum

By SONYA SMITH
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

A financing plan for a \$280 million transit system for the Great Park area was unanimously approved by the City Council Tuesday.

Now, city officials are looking to the California Transportation Commission and the Orange County Transportation Authority for money for the project.

"This is a very important piece of (the city's) transportation," said Mayor Beth Krom.

The five-mile-long combination streetcar and bus system would link the future Great Park, Irvine Spectrum, Irvine train station and the Lennar Corp.'s housing, commercial and educational development that will surround the Great Park. Operations are expected to cost \$7 million each year.

"The guide way is something that will be good for the park; bringing people to the park without using cars and parking lots," Lead Great Park Designer Ken Smith has said.

The preliminary funding plan suggests that the money come from the following sources:

To plan and build the system:

- Proposition 116: \$121.3 million
- City of Irvine/local sources: \$25.6 million
- Renewed Measure M funds: \$98.2 million
- State Highway Account: \$40 million

To operate and maintain the system:

- Fares: \$3 million
- Renewed Measure M funds: \$3.6 million
- Advertising revenue: \$400,000

The Proposition 116 state funding is \$121 million that was first allocated to the city in 1990 for a transportation system near John Wayne Airport. The money was rerouted to Centerline in 1999 – a light-rail line that would have stretched 11.4 miles across Irvine, Costa Mesa and Santa Ana; that was rejected by voters in 2003.

To use the Centerline money, the city must obtain state approval to reallocate the funds while finding a matching \$121 million and another \$38 million to build the project.

Councilman Larry Agran said that the Great Park system is an important first step in building a city-wide system of various types of transportation.

Council members Christina Shea and Steven Choi both expressed a concern Tuesday about having a combination of streetcars and buses. But, city staff assured the council that plans for the transit system can be modified.

The proposed system would:

- Have 3.4 miles of streetcar track in the Great Park portion. The Spectrum portion would have 1.6 miles of bus route.
- Mostly have street-level stations, except for an elevated portion near the Irvine train station.
- Have wait times of 10 to 15 minutes. Service would be available between 5:30 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week.
- Have nine stations, including: The Double Tree Hotel, Irvine Spectrum, Irvine Technology Center, Irvine train station and the Great Park sports complex.
- Include trees on both sides of the streetcar route to minimize the intrusiveness of overhead electrical wires.
- Add a lane for the bus system on each side of Alton Parkway.
- Have an estimated 5,000 riders each day, with 6,500 during peak demand.
- Provide service to a growing population. Population within four miles of the system is expected to grow by 38,676 residents and 118,755 workers before 2030.

Contact the writer: 949-553-2911 or sosmith@ocregister.com

