



Commercial pitches wider mass transit ideas

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As Kansas City tries to convince voters to approve a downtown streetcar line, a new commercial is encouraging people across the city to start thinking about mass transit options.

Downtown residents are expected to vote again soon on assessing a sales tax to pay for a streetcar line that would run between Union Station and the River Market. The new commercial aims to get people to think about even bigger projects down the line.

"Imagine taking a train to the ballpark or a streetcar around town," the commercial said, suggesting the eventual addition of commuter trains from the suburbs.

Advocates said they think people in car-happy Kansas City are changing their minds about mass transit.

"I don't think, in the near future, Kansas City can afford to be depending on their cars," said Virdell Williams of Kansas City.

Streetcar advocates have long pointed to Portland and the city's successful \$55 million streetcar line. The project was accompanied by another \$500 million in redevelopment subsidies along the route.

While Portland's program was successful, critic Randal O'Toole of the Libertarian Cato Institute said it wasn't just because of the streetcars.

"So the \$55 million streetcar line did not generate that new development. It was a half-billion dollars in subsidies generating development, but they never mention this," O'Toole said.

Some streetcar advocates acknowledge that just replacing bus fleets with other forms of mass transit doesn't always work. Some cities have streetcar lines that struggle.

Kansas City's streetcar line would cost \$100 million.

"What's not expensive? Food is expensive. Cars are expensive. You know that," said Darrel Kind of Kansas City.

Voters approved the idea of a streetcar line in a recent mail-in vote. Advocates are working out details and may take a streetcar tax proposal to downtown voters as early as November.