

Fort Lauderdale Commission Approves Streetcar Tax

By: Chris Joseph – July 10, 2013

Streetcars conjure up visions of San Francisco, New Orleans, Uncle Ben's Rice, and that Marlon Brando movie where he pleads for his wife to return to him after he beats her. But now, it will also conjure up downtown Fort Lauderdale because Ft. Lauderdale Commissioners have unanimously approved a plan to tax downtown property owners for the electronic streetcar called "The Wave," that will run through the downtown Fort Lauderdale area by 2016.

"The Wave" will operate, in part, via overhead electrical wires in some areas and by battery power in others. It'll supposedly be traveling a 2.7-mile loop around inner downtown Ft. Lauderdale and, thanks to the commissioners, it will cost local property owners \$20.6 million bucks.

The total cost for the trolley is around \$142.6 million, with a chunk of it being paid with federal, state and local government dollars.

The county's portion, which funds operation and maintenance costs, is \$2.5 million annually beginning in 2016.

Of course, not everyone is all that fired up over the trolley system.

Just a year ago, Randal O'Toole, a scholar with the Cato Institute, told *New Times* that this whole trolley business wasn't such a hot idea.

"I like to call it faith-based transportation planning," he said at the time. "They don't consider reality. All the planners consider is what they wish people would do."

O'Toole argues that the economic development benefits touted by local politicians to a trolley system are based around misleading figures, and that "hundreds of millions of dollars of infrastructure subsidies, tax breaks, and other incentives to build in the streetcar corridor" are unaccounted for.

Meanwhile, local business owners are nervous about the whole thing.

From *the Sun-Sentinel*:

Businesswoman Judy Miller is afraid her downtown paint store will not survive the Wave's construction phase, because her clients will not put up with the roadwork hassles. It galls her that she will have to help pay for the project that could put her out of business.

"They're assessing the wrong people," Miller said. "The entire city should be assessed if this is a citywide project."

Commissioner Bobby DuBose begs to differ, saying that their hope is that the streetcar system will eventually connect to the airport, port, Tri-Rail and other destinations, because things line life take time... *er something*.

"You take what you have and you build a solid foundation," DuBose said. "Everything in life starts somewhere with a piece."

The streetcar is slated to start with a 1.4 mile stretch (at the low, low cost of \$83 million) in 2016, and will start at the Central Bus Terminal on Broward Boulevard, then through Brickell Avenue, onto the Riverfront complex, and over to Las Olas Boulevard to Southeast Third Ave. The streetcar will then cross the New River on 3rd, go by the County Courthouse on 6th Street, loop around on 7th and then head back north.

EVERYBODY GOT THAT?

Funding partners to build the transportation system include the City of Fort Lauderdale, the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration, and the Florida Department of Transportation.

Broward County will be responsible for operational costs once the project is up and running.