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Transit coalition throws support behind Red Line tunnel plan

Baltimore Business Journal - by Scott Dance Staff

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The **Central Maryland Transportation Alliance** has joined business advocacy group the **Greater Baltimore Committee** in backing a plan for the Red Line east-west transit system that would include Light Rail through two tunnels at a cost of \$1.6 billion.

That strengthens business community support behind the plan, known as option 4C, as city and state officials evaluate which of about a dozen different options to endorse. A final decision from the **Maryland Transit Administration** and Gov. Martin O'Malley is expected in February.

The Red Line is planned to offer mass transit across an east-west axis of the city to complement its existing systems, the Light Rail and Metro subway systems. Project engineering is slated to begin in the spring and several years of construction is scheduled to start in 2013.

The CMTA's endorsement includes the backing of business leaders and group board members such as James L. Shea, chairman of Venable LLP; Laurie Schwartz, managing consultant of the **Waterfront Partnership Baltimore Inc.**; Thomas E. Wilcox, president of the **Baltimore Community Foundation**; J. Howard Henderson, president of the **Baltimore Urban League**; Donald C. Fry, CEO of the GBC; and Otis Rolley III, former Baltimore City Planning Director and CEO of CMTA.

Option 4C calls for tunnels under the Cooks Lane area in west Baltimore and through downtown, Harbor East and Fells Point.

It would have a 41-minute travel time over its entire length, from Woodlawn to Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in east Baltimore. It's expected to draw 42,000 riders per day, take 65,000 cars off the road and take away about 250 parking spaces.

Rolley said in a statement that he thinks option 4C offers the most advantages and the economic opportunities.

Other options being considered call for bus rapid transit instead of light rail. Under that type of system, buses are run more frequently than traditional bus service and in dedicated lanes. Some options also include more or less tunneling. Two options also involve building little to nothing and simply continuing to rely on traditional bus service.

Travel times across the length of the system vary from 36 minutes on a tunnel-heavy route to 76 minutes on bus rapid transit. On current city bus lines, it takes 80 minutes.

Estimated costs range from \$281 million to \$2.4 billion.