

## Peachtree Trolley Faces Funding Hurdle

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A streetcar in Portland, Ore. Proposals for similar trolleys along Peachtree Street in Atlanta have been based on Portland's streetcars.

Leaders of the push to put streetcars back on Peachtree Street say they've crossed the 50 yard line. They are more than halfway to the goal line of getting this project done. But the biggest tackler to get by is the next one they face; funding a \$190 million project.

After two years of work and planning the details of the project are now in. And those details played to a packed house at the First Presbyterian Church in Midtown on Tuesday night. It was standing room only with residents and business people thirsty for information.

The discussion is led by Ray Christman and the Peachtree Corridor Partnership.

"Nobody feels under-taxed in this world so the questions are around financing... but the tax bite on people will be minimal and affordable we think," Christman said.

Capital costs on phase one are \$190 million with about 75 percent of that coming from a special assessment district and the remaining 25 percent coming from the city of Atlanta general fund.

The special assessment district would be all the commercial and residential property in an area within a quarter mile of Peachtree Street itself. For example -- someone with a \$300,000 condo in that area could expect their property taxes to go up \$240 to \$360 per year.

"We've determined that as much as we wish somebody else would pay for it if we want this to happen we have to raise the money locally," said Christman.

Several cities across the country are working on streetcar projects... Many are being modeled on this modern streetcar system in Portland, Oregon. Computer models show what the street car project would look like in Atlanta. The idea is to transform the most important corridor in the city into a world class show piece that draws tourists, new residents, and economic development.

There are many powerful people behind the plan, but there are those lining up against it as well.

"This is a waste," said John Sherman.

Sherman and his group has been a watchdog on taxes for 15 years.

"We're absolutely opposed to street cars for many reasons -- namely the cost to taxpayers," said Sherman.

So that is the big debate now. The Atlanta City Council has to approve the special tax district, and also the money from the general fund. State leaders also have to get involved to approve a new parking tax to pay for operational expenses. If that happens, planners say, the first phase could be complete in six years.