

JEDC Downtown Revitalization
Circulator Meeting August 21, 2012
Summary

Attending: Greg Fisk, Ke Mell, James Marcus, James Bibb, Ben Lyman, Brian Holst, Margo Waring

Greg reviewed the circulator concept, how it started with moving tourists uptown. The Willoughby district planning process moved the conversation into the development opportunities of a circulator. Originally, the route was Franklin, 4th, Main and back. Then the Federal Building was added. Other ideas have also been mentioned. The idea moved to year round. Free ridership was discussed. Now we see a circulator as a “pedestrian extender” as long as the frequency is in the 10-15 minute range.

We have discussed either a bus or a streetcar. They have about the same operating cost (the streetcar a bit less). The main cost is personnel. Streetcars have lower maintenance costs. We agreed that as a development tool streetcars are more desirable than buses.

About the need to link to parking, Ben noted that however you get to downtown, the circulator is how you get around, though we can provide further out parking to reduce congestion that can be multi story or park and ride.

We discussed linking the senior center, schools and Bill Ray center. The further out the route, the more likely we are to attract the 50% of residents beyond the schools who currently drive. This would reduce parking demand. We discussed a route that would go to the Yacht Club. We discussed going to the high school and using the turf field area or behind it as a turnaround; Norway Point; going to the boat harbor; going to a point where it would connect with the Sea Walk, thereby solidifying the circulator’s connection to the Seawalk and to reducing visitor congestion.

Ke suggested we start with buses for 3-5 years and this would help determine routes. Greg noted that a super capacitor bus costs about \$8 million. A fixed route or street car gives much more development impact.

Why don’t people use buses in the way that they would use streetcars? Discussion included the social stigma of buses. A streetcar could itself be a visitor venue. Visitors would pay a large share of the operating costs. We discussed the relationship between the number of stops and length of the system to the frequency (10-15 minutes).

One way and narrow streets mean we need loops, while some streets such as Main could take two lanes of track.

Ben brought us back to look at the purpose of the circulator. Buses don’t have the economic development impact of a fixed route option. Since the purpose of the effort is downtown revitalization, to bring economic development to underdeveloped areas, a streetcar does this more. We don’t need to impact the built out neighborhoods and it would be objected to by them.

Ben stated that

1. We need to connect to winter deserted areas and
2. We need to connect within the downtown core.
3. We need redevelopment and reinvestment in certain parts of town and
4. We need a focus on the Willoughby District where much is now empty and we have the ability

to make new connections and open up the super blocks.

Remember, transit, streets, access routes are the development grid.

As stable residential areas, Tenth and Eleventh streets need no redevelopment, though properties in the harbor area do.

Going further north could be a later extension.

Greg noted that the maximum impact is gained in development and property taxes on 3 blocks on either side of a fixed route.

Ben noted the timeliness of our efforts. CBJ will be putting out an RFP for a new transit development plan. The last was done in 2008. This will be an “operational analysis” and focus on how to re-configure the service. As we have limited parking, increased density allowances and encouraged transit oriented development, we will have a need to increase capacity.

Ben advised that our group get its points together into a few pages of goals, opportunities, maps that can be incorporated into the plan and become adopted by the assembly.

Greg has talked with Rorie Watt about the seawalk.

Greg suggests that we look to start the route at the Jacobson dock. This would allow for the development of that node that is now underdeveloped and the circulator would keep the sidewalk along Taku Smokeries less congested. Ben noted that the Franklin dock owners are very opposed to city transit there as they see themselves providing transportation. For that reason the Jacobson dock as the start/end of the streetcar makes most sense.

We discussed a streetcar barn at the rock dump or at the old steam power plant building owned by Bill Corbus. The building has a new roof and he has looked at leasing the property. Bringing people to it would support retail uses in the building. Miner’s Cove would also benefit.

We discussed whether pedestrian streets had been proposed for downtown. Shattuck Way will be closed, at least temporarily. Front Street has been occasionally. Seward has for specific events.

We began drawing routes. Up Franklin-across front-up and down Main. Eventually we had several different routes to explore, including ending at the bridge, breaking up the superblocs, limiting routes on Egan. A route touched the back side of the new SLAM. These sheets are available.

Greg brought up the idea of inviting Keith Jones to visit between September 10-14 to spend a technical day walking routes and talking with the group. He could also do a public presentation on transit oriented development.

We discussed the variety and cost of streetcars. New ones are the 60 foot articulated type but have built in wheelchair access. Vintage ones are shorter and a fraction of the cost but would have to have wheel chair access engineered into them. Among the vintage types a preference for the art deco style was preferred as it is consistent with some of the downtown buildings and a period of downtown growth.