

BOB THOMAS ANNOUNCES NEW TRAM SYSTEM for DOWNTOWN KNOXVILLE

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I'm Bob Thomas, candidate for Knoxville City Council.

As we quickly move toward election day in Knoxville, there are many concerns for citizens to think about. As many of you know, I am a fiscally conservative person and I have strong opinions about the city finances, recode, affordable housing, homelessness, the opioid crisis and many more subjects. But today, I only want to focus on Downtown Knoxville.

I believe that being on City Council is more than just reacting. I believe we all want and need leaders with visions and ideas for the future of our city. Downtown Knoxville has been the driving force in our city's tremendous growth into a great city. It wasn't too long ago that downtown looked a lot different. I can remember when you could walk from Regas restaurant to Gay Street and maybe see two people. I remember when the Old City was mostly dilapidated buildings. I remember when there was a sign in a corner store on the 100-block of gay street that said "will the last person to leave downtown, please turn off the lights." We've come a long way and downtown is alive again.

The revitalization of Downtown Knoxville has dramatically increased the revenues of the city with property taxes and sales tax receipts. I have personally been involved with Downtown Knoxville most of my life. When I was 21 and working in Knoxville radio, I revived the Knoxville Christmas Parade. Then became the Chairman of the Knoxville Christmas Parade for the next 20 years. Because of that, I was honored with a presentation by the mayor for being one of the Top Volunteers in Knoxville.

In 1980, I believed that hockey could survive in Knoxville and had the Knoxville Cherokees - one of the five founding teams of the East Coast Hockey League. I did over 300 games at the Knoxville coliseum bringing in over \$25 million to the Knoxville economy.

During all those years, I learned a lot about Downtown Knoxville and government. While planning our reception today – which all of your are invited to – I was encouraged to share a vision I have had for Downtown Knoxville for several years. This is a vision that I have seen from thousands of hours of doing events downtown.

Let's start by saying one of the great things about downtown is there are five different entertainment areas. One of the most challenging things about downtown is it has five different entertainment areas... that are not connected. We have:

1. The Coliseum and Auditorium
2. The Old City and future new ballpark
3. Market Square
4. The Convention Center at Worlds Fair Park
5. The Riverfront and UT stadium area

If you drive downtown to visit one of the five locations, you park your car, go to the area and then return to your car and go home. 90% of the time you would not visit two of the five areas in the same night. For years, I have thought Downtown Knoxville could attain an even greater success if you could easily visit all five areas in one night. But how? I decided to develop the “ideal” situation and plant that seed in the minds of Knoxville’s movers and shakers with this press conference today. I took my idea to MBI's President Louis Cortina. He liked it and brought in his firm led by engineer David Matlock. So for the last few months they have worked on it so that I could present it here today.

We have designed the layout for a Knoxville tram route that would connect all five of Downtown Knoxville's great entertainment areas. This “ideal” situation would be a single track, automated, electric, elevated tram on a 2 3/4 mile circular track. It would take about fifteen minutes to make the entire loop from 35 feet in the air.

Let me walk you thru the proposed stops:

1. Main Terminal at the Coliseum with 2500 parking spots and home to concerts and the Ice Bears. And maybe Starbucks and other shops if it became a 7-day a week terminal.
2. Leaving the Coliseum, we head along Hall of Fame Drive and into the first stop above Patton and Jackson at what we have called The Old City/Smokies station.
3. Heading back toward downtown, we ride above Summitt Hill and stop at the Market Square/ Crowne Plaza station. Besides connecting to Market Square, this is also an example of how the tram could become a great benefit for tourists staying at a hotel as the tram could be accessed from the second floor of the hotel.
4. From this point, the tram would use gravity for a lot of the remaining ride as we go down Summitt Hill then across Henley to connect to either the front of the Convention Center or the back of the Sunsphere. This helps the "parking- strapped" Convention Center by making the 2500 Coliseum parking spots convenient for events in the Convention Center, World's Fair Park and the Museum of Art.
5. Leaving the Convention Center we head toward Neyland Drive above Poplar and Game Day way before stopping at the Volunteer Landing station for easy access to the riverfront's restaurants, river cruises and of course, Neyland Stadium on game days.
6. We wrap up the 15-minute trip heading down Neyland Drive across Hall of Fame and coming into the back of the Coliseum.

This tram being elevated does not require stopping traffic or taking wide areas of land, only cooperation with mostly city land where the tram track would be supported. My vision is this being built and operated by a private entity or entertainment company who can foresee the tram ride itself becoming a tourist attraction. It could also possibly qualify for grants given for public transportation.

Just to recap...what this would do:

1. Create a new tourist attraction that gives visitors a bird's eye view of our great city.
2. Ties our five downtown entertainment areas together so everyone can easily access them all in one visit.
3. Brings 2500 parking spots into use for a new baseball park, the Convention Center or UT home games.
4. Potentially turns the Coliseum into a mall with coffee shops and other stores for every day not just on event days.

I realize this is not going to happen next year or maybe even in ten years, but I present it as an idea for the future for us all to think about. This is a glimpse into the future that takes Knoxville to an even greater level. Remember that every great idea started with just one single thought in one person's brain. All of us here today are capable of great ideas. We always need to encourage those that bring us new ideas. And I think we need more of that in government.

I want to thank the entire team that made all of today possible. Foremost to Louis Cortina, David Matlock and all the staff at MBI. Thanks to Holly Hambright for that kind introduction and for providing the food at our reception today. Thanks to Jimmy and Muffet Buckner for providing Downtown211.com – Knoxville's Perfect Entertainment Venue. Thanks to Joe and Alyse McCamish for video production, editing and camera work. Thanks to Eddie Speeks of Stellar Visions for production. I encourage you to stay and look at the picture and map of the track, then join us upstairs for our reception. I will be here should you have any questions.

For more information or interviews, contact Bob Thomas at 818.693.2628