

The Baltimore Gondola

LAI Baltimore Chapter – May, 2016 meeting

Trey Winstead and Nate Pretl visited the Baltimore Chapter of LAI on May 18th to provide an overview of their proposal to construct and operate an urban gondola whose purpose would be to efficiently move commuters and tourists through the most traffic choked portions of downtown Baltimore. Specifically, they are proposing a gondola system that would move people in an east-west configuration from the City's stadium area to the Canton neighborhood, with 4 additional stops along the way (see attached overview of the gondola's proposed layout).

As anyone who has attempted to drive to or from Canton during rush hour knows, current traffic conditions going east or west within the City are quite congested, turning the relatively short 2.5 mile distance between Canton and the central business district into a frustrating commute that can easily stretch to 30 minutes or more. The proposed gondola would reduce that commute time down to a predictable 12 minutes. It would add an interesting alternative for tourists who currently spend about 40 minutes covering the same distance in a water-taxi. Instead of a view of the Baltimore Harbor from a boat, tourists could get an elevated view of the City and travel the same distance in about ¼ of the time entailed in a water-taxi trip.

Trey and Nate verbally walked the LAI audience through the logistics of how the gondola system would work:

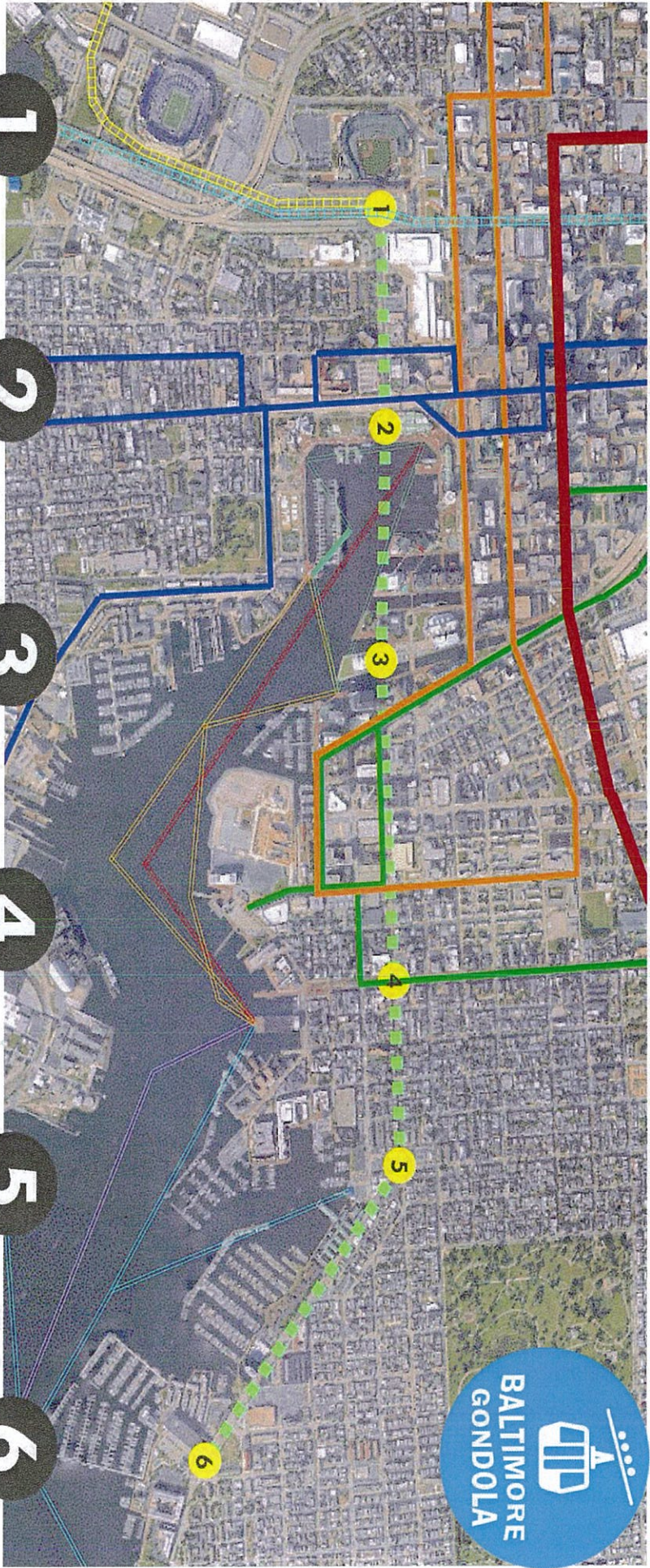
- A continuous loop of high strength cable would run at a consistent 12 mph.
- Stations would be elevated about 25-35 feet above streetlevel, supported by towers strategically placed to minimize interference with vehicular or pedestrian traffic (see attached Typical Station Elevation).
- 8 person detachable cabins would be continuously arriving and departing from each station such that wait times would be negligible.
- A single 800 HP electric motor (with back-up diesel engines) would power the system utilizing solar panels atop stations, making the gondola system ecofriendly. It would reduce vehicular traffic, thereby reducing fossil fuel consumption, and be powered largely by the sun.

Although I came into this presentation highly skeptical that a gondola system in Baltimore would be anything more than an unsightly addition to the aesthetic of the City, after listening to the details, I found the merits of this proposal to be compelling. How appealing it would be to hop into a gondola cabin downtown and ride above the City's traffic, while afforded some interesting views and able to guiltlessly check emails, while in transit to one of Canton's many nice restaurants. With the bonus of feeling like I've actually done a good thing for the environment in the process. My initial skepticism was quickly transformed into enthusiasm. Urban gondolas are an idea whose time appears to have come!

Confirming that my initial myopic perspective on urban gondolas was just that - short-sighted, Trey & Nate provided examples of successful gondola systems in Medellin, Columbia; Portland, Oregon; London and Rio de Janeiro, among others. Quite a few U.S. cities are actively considering gondolas as was highlighted in a Wall Street Journal article published shortly after Trey & Nate's presentation, linked

here: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/uphill-climb-cities-push-gondolas-on-skeptical-commuters-1465237251>

Trey & Nate are continuing to develop the project as they prepare to propose the idea to the next City administration. But after hearing Trey & Nate's presentation, one can only hope that our City's next mayor has the vision to seriously consider the merits of an urban gondola system. Thank you Trey & Nate for opening this writer's eyes to the possibility of, and potential for, improved ecofriendly urban commuting. Pretty cool idea guys.



1

STADIUM CENTRAL STATION
 CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR
 Orange - 2 blocks
 LIGHT RAIL
 Transfer
 MARC TRAIN
 Transfer
 METRO
 Less than 4 blocks

2

DOWNTOWN INNER HARBOUR
 CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR
 Purple - less than 1 blocks
 Banner - less than 1 blocks
 WATER TAXI
 2 Routes - less than 1 blocks
 METRO
 Less than 4 blocks

3

INNER HARBOUR EAST
 CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR
 Orange - 1 blocks
 Green - 1 blocks
 WATER TAXI
 Orange - 1 blocks
 Green - 1 blocks

4

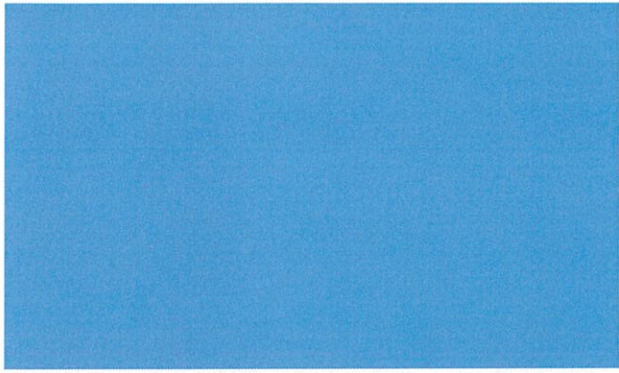
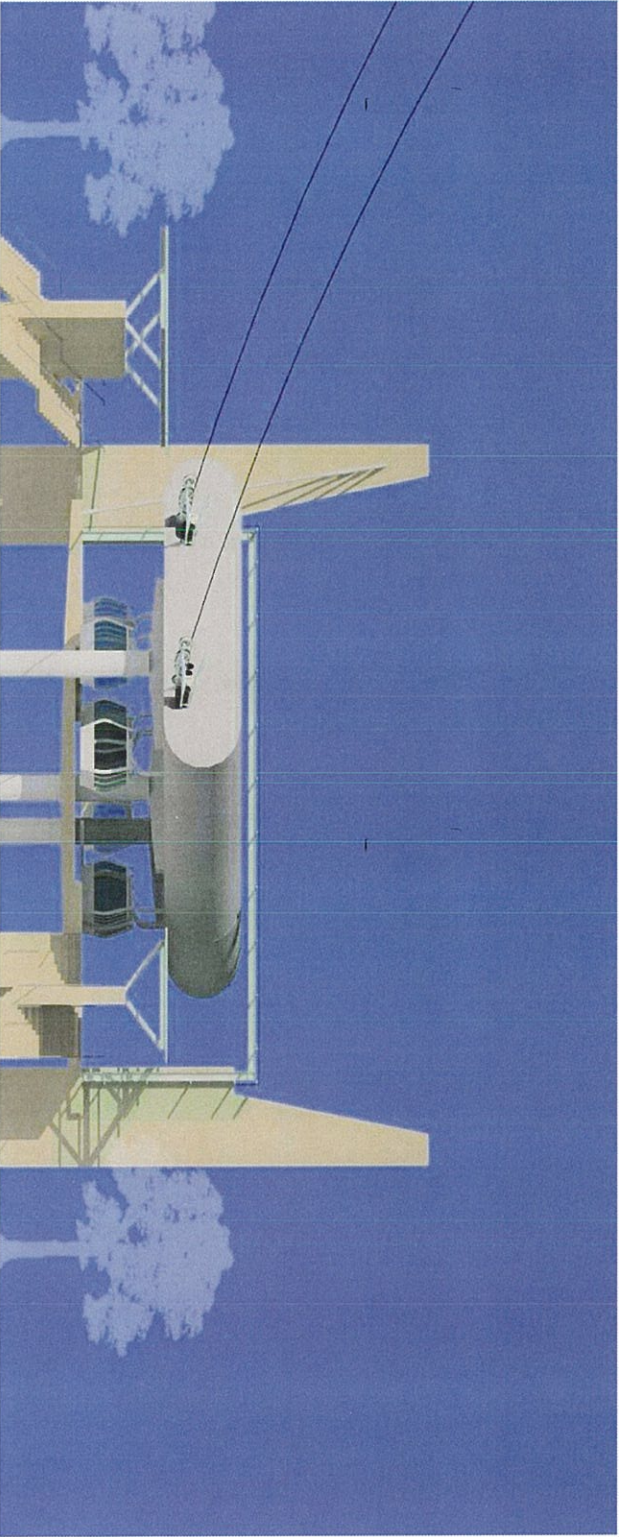
FELLS POINT BROADWAY
 CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR
 Green - Transfer
 Orange - 3 blocks
 WATER TAXI
 Blue - 2 blocks
 Purple - 2 blocks
 Orange - 2 blocks
 Green - 2 blocks

5

FLEET STREET
 WATER TAXI
 Blue - 1 block

6

CANTON
 BOSTON STREET WATER TAXI
 Blue 2 - blocks
 I-95 PARK AND RIDE



TYPICAL STATION ELEVATION