

## Consider nature on Lemmon tram decision

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The star's view: **A tram would change the face of the mountain.** Before rushing into a decision, a feasibility study is needed.

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Solitude doesn't carry a price tag. But in a community that's crawling up every mountainside to make room for a million people, solitude may be the most valuable line item of all as Pima County studies building an aerial tram to Mount Lemmon.

The study is spurred by the renaissance of Summerhaven, the village atop the mountain that burned in the 2003 Aspen Fire. The rustic collection of restaurants and gift shops already drew crowds. Now, community residents and a team of UA designers have come up with a plan that is sure to make it even a bigger attraction, with streamside walking paths, more parking, a larger lodge, an upscale restaurant and time-share condos.

**An aerial tram that zooms people back and forth from Catalina State Park is just what this reborn village needs.**

But Mount Lemmon is more than Summerhaven. Cars squeezed into every available space at the village last weekend, carrying families who came to eat pie, buy wind chimes and conduct business in the middle of a forest. But up and down the mountain, cars also squeezed into every trailhead and picnic site, carrying people just poking around or diving deep inside the sprawling natural wonders of the mountain.

**A tram offers little to these users** without a fairly elaborate mountain shuttle system to accompany it. Worse, it threatens to damage their mountain experience.

The new study may well show that revenues will offset the costs of an aerial tram with enough left over for a shuttle around Summerhaven and the Ski Valley complex nearby.

But we don't need a study to imagine how towers and cables will affect the spectacular vistas enjoyed by all kinds of people - those who might be looking through the windshield on a spin through Catalina State Park or trekking on foot up to the peak along the Sutherland Trail.

Stand in these high places and look down, and you can't miss seeing how people have shaped the landscape below. In deciding whether to build a tram, we should consider the value of looking up and experiencing nothing but the work of nature. Today, you see sawtooth peaks, blue shadows, yellow columbine. You hear the cry of a red-tailed hawk, wind in the trees, an occasional gurgling stream. You smell an earthy aroma.

One key question moving forward is how easy we need to make it to reach Mount Lemmon. A journey to a world-class, isolated, natural area need not be as quick as a spin to the mall. And the study comes just as work winds up on a faster, safer road to the top. Besides, for much of the urban area, **half the drive to Summerhaven is getting through the city to the Catalina Highway.** The same will be true for a tram launch.

County Supervisor Ray Carroll is right to pursue all options for making Mount Lemmon accessible to a growing population. The idea of a top-to-bottom shuttle bus is worth revisiting, too. It didn't get the study it deserved five years ago before it was shot down amid complaints that it was too expensive and that it was too intrusive.

Carroll is right, too, in speaking of the "greater good" as we weigh the value of this against the potential environmental costs. We were concerned at his observation in an interview last week that the Catalinas contain "thousands of square miles of identical wilderness," meaning some may be expendable, but we were heartened to hear him say, "I'm not interested in anything right now except the feasibility study."

With that, we concur.

- D.J.

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