

Speak up on Mount Lemmon tram idea

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People who live in the Northwest have a special stake in the discussion about whether Catalina State Park will be used as the launching point for an **aerial tram to Mount Lemmon**.

That's why it's important for people here to make their opinions known - for or against - once the call goes out for public input. That day will come after completion of a feasibility study ordered by the Pima County Board of Supervisors that will address the engineering challenges of such an undertaking.

The idea has appeal, as it did in Albuquerque, where an aerial tram inspired by European models opened in 1966. On the Sandia Peak Tram, the longest of its kind, a cabin carrying up to 50 people whizzes along steel cables a distance of three miles and an elevation of 2,000 feet in just half an hour.

The Catalina Mountains version would travel an even greater distance. Few other details are known yet. One thing's for sure: It would shave up to an hour off the time it takes people from this region to reach Mount Lemmon.

Among the questions to be answered are whether this project is compatible with the community's vision for Catalina State Park. Other public lands to the north have been mentioned as alternative launching points but, regardless, the tramway would likely be visible from points within the 5,500 acre park.

If the Albuquerque tramway is any indication, the lower support towers would be taller than the upper structures. There, they stand 232 feet. By comparison, the Bank of America building Downtown - Tucson's second tallest - is 264 feet.

Care would have to be taken with this kind of man-made infrastructure to preserve what makes the park special. Here's one assessment of what that is, from the Web page of the Arizona State Parks system: "Bring along your curiosity and your sense of adventure as you take in the beautiful mountain backdrop, desert wildflowers, cacti and wildlife that call this area home."

Ken Travous, state parks director, echoes the reaction many people have to the prospect of a bird's-eye view on the spectacular Santa Catalina Mountains: "It sounds neat," he said in an interview Tuesday. Still, Travous has only been involved in discussions with other officials so far and is eager to hear what the broader community has to say.

Unless the tram idea goes forward, much of the work outlined in the humble plan for Catalina State Park is done. A campground addition opened earlier this year and the group-use area will grow some. There also are plans but no money on the horizon for a visitors center near the site of Hohokam ruins, similar to the center at Saguaro National Park West, said Assistant Catalina State Park Manager Jack McCabe.

That doesn't mean long-range plans can't change. Let's just make sure we consider what we're giving up as well as what we're getting if this Northwest gem is converted into use as a tramway station.

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NewsTalk

* Would you like to see an aerial tram linking Catalina State Park and Mount Lemmon?

Share your thoughts on NewsTalk. Responses will be published in next week's NWS. Please include your name, a phone number for verification and information about yourself, such as your occupation.

Comments should reach us by 10 a.m. Thursday.

E-mail: newsq@azstarnet.com. Limited to four sentences.

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