

Mt. Lemmon tram piques Oro Valley's interest

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Oro Valley residents and town officials are interested in what the proposed Mount Lemmon Aerial Tram could mean for them.

Information about the tram will be available Aug. 24 at the Oro Valley Town Council meeting during a presentation by Curtis Lueck, contract project manager for Pima County Parks and Recreation.

Currently Pima County officials are seeking statements of qualifications from firms interested in conducting a feasibility assessment, planning, designing and construction administration for the proposed tramway.

The tram, anticipated to be about five miles long, could take off from Catalina State Park, the entrance of which is in Oro Valley, and rise a mile in elevation, officials said.

Because of its proximity to Oro Valley, the tram could bring year-round tourism dollars to Oro Valley, but environmental and view shed impacts (land that can be seen from a single viewpoint) are a concern.

The feasibility study, which could take from six months to a year to complete, will include feedback from Oro Valley residents, said Rafael Payan, director of Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation.

"Public input is critical in making a decision," Payan said.

About a year ago the idea for the Mount Lemmon Aerial Tram came before the Oro Valley Town Council, said Mayor Paul Loomis. The council set up a study session but later postponed it until more information became available from Pima County.

Loomis said the project is "very much in the concept stage."

"There are a lot of ideas," Loomis said. "We're certainly interested in participating."

Noting that balance needs to be identified in the project, Loomis said: "There certainly are economic development positives associated with it (the tram). And then there's the environmental impacts and the view shed."

Translating into more hotel stays, shopping and restaurant patronage, Payan said revenue from tourism could be year-round for Oro Valley, from skiing in the winter to beating the summer heat.

"There is certainly the potential for local revenue," Payan said. "Tourism dollars could certainly go up."

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has not taken a position on the project because the environmental studies have not been done, said Carolyn Campbell, executive director for the Coalition.

Using existing utility corridors for the tram's path could minimize impact to the mountain, Payan said.

"If the project goes forward, certainly the view shed will be protected," Payan said. "That is a concern of ours as well."

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If you go

* What: Mount Lemmon Aerial Tram presentation at Oro Valley Town Council meeting

* When: Aug. 24; council meeting starts at 7 p.m.

* Where: Town Council Chambers, 11000 N. La Cañada Drive

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* Contact reporter Sarah J. Bell at 434-4076 or at sbell@azstarnet.com

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