

Let's put to rest dream of tram into Catalinas

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Our view: Cost, controversy would pose huge barriers; it's not even close to a priority

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Let's see, it's been what - seven years - so that means, yes, it's time for someone to share their dream of building a tram to the top of Mount Lemmon.

Tucsonans seem to have this vision every few years, dating back to at least the 1970s. As far as we can tell from newspaper accounts, every dreamer snaps awake at exactly the same point and moves on with real life.

This time around it's a group of Oro Valley town officials who have what Town Manager Greg Caton calls ideas "in the conceptual stage."

As the Star's Tony Davis reported on Sunday, that means they haven't overcome the obstacles of cost and controversy.

Cost alone ought to put an end to this flight of fancy. Caton told Davis \$50 million "may be on the low end." Back in 1989, a grandiose plan that included a hotel and restaurant complex carried a \$250 million price tag.

The idea might be worth debating if private business wanted to build and operate the tram. But that has never happened. And this certainly isn't a project for a so-called "public-private" partnership. Local governments need to spend dollars to fix and widen roads that the public depends upon. As for the federal government, bring our interstate highways and bridges up to par before entertaining any thought of a tram to haul recreational pie-eaters to the top of Mount Lemmon.

Then there's the other "c" word: controversy. Environmental groups would likely oppose the tram's construction across the Santa Catalinas.

There's truly no "need" for a tram. People who are unable to hike the Catalinas can drive the road to the top of Mount Lemmon or ride the shuttle in Sabino Canyon. Personally, we don't even need to "be" in the mountains to be inspired by them. It's a blessing every day just to look.

We appreciate that the tram-dreamers share our love of Tucson's spectacular natural setting and want to promote it. We think the best way to do that is by spending on parks and expanding and improving hiking trails and the bicycle loop around the metro area.

A tram would be too expensive and too divisive. We urge its supporters to set their sights elsewhere.

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