

Courthouse  
Task Force



**Paul Kenna**

*Master Plan Committee*

White Paper #25  
New Whatcom and Fairhaven  
Electric Railway – Paul Kenna  
Handout for March 21, 2003

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February 21, 2003

Ms. Patricia Decker  
Waterfront Future Project Director  
Port of Bellingham  
1801 Roeder Avenue  
Bellingham, WA 98227

Dear Ms. Decker

As a citizen committed to the process of rejuvenating Down Town, Old Town and the Waterfront, and a railroad professional and amateur historian, I would welcome the chance to discuss with you the concept of a heritage streetcar, or trolley. As mentioned in the attached proposal summary, the concept is not new to Bellingham planners but is not yet being developed here.

Of all the great things now happening in Bellingham's rebirth, there is not yet a project being studied that unifies all the diverse improvements, both planned and being developed. I feel this alone is reason enough that the heritage streetcar idea needs more serious consideration and study. Although not exclusively a waterfront project, the streetcar can enhance the waterfront redevelopment by tying it in with Bellingham's favorite attractions.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to presenting this idea further. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Paul Kenna

attachments

## THE NEW WHATCOM & FAIRHAVEN ELECTRIC RAILWAY *A Proposal*

With the rebirth of Downtown Bellingham finally becoming a reality, and a new era for Old Town and the Waterfront being launched, the timing is right to further develop the idea of a heritage streetcar line. Initial reference to the concept already appears in the *Railroad Avenue Action Plan* and *City Center Master Plan*, 2002.

Like modern light rail, the heritage streetcar, or trolley, runs on track and draws electric power from an overhead wire. Unlike modern light rail, it uses restored or replicas of old style cars from early to mid-twentieth century and serves not only as a clean attractive form of transportation, but also as a tourist draw.

A new system costs about one tenth as much as modern light rail. The cost can further be reduced substantially by using existing track long buried under pavement, or existing rail lines. A proposed Bellingham route (see map) would take advantage of both these.

A route combining a circulator through Downtown, Old Town and the Civic Center area, with an extension to Fairhaven following the historic State Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street streetcar route, would link the Bellingham predecessor towns of New Whatcom, Sehome and Fairhaven. Linking the prosperous Fairhaven district with a reviving Downtown and Old Town would further insure their success, drawing tourists and serving residents along the route with an attractive non-polluting source of transportation for local use. Combined with parking areas, it would reduce down town auto congestion and on-street parking.

An exciting further possibility would be an extension to the Georgia Pacific redevelopment area and on to Bellwether, Squalicum Harbor and Cornwall Park.

A proven concept, there are now 23 heritage trolley lines operating in the U.S. and Canada, in cities ranging from San Francisco to places such as Fort Nelson, B.C., Issaquah, Washington and El Reno, Oklahoma. In addition, 20 lines are either being planned or under active construction.

As such, benefits can be demonstrated. These include:

- A sense of permanence, the street railway being a fixed structure
- A catalyst for economic development along the route
- Increased mobility for down town areas and on-line neighborhoods
- Enhanced tourist draw- simply put, trolleys are more fun than busses

Would this work for Bellingham? That a variety of cities are already doing this should at least make it worthy of study. The risk of looking into it is small. Much greater would be the loss of a missed opportunity.

Paul Kenna  
February, 2003

To Cornwall Park  
Orchard St

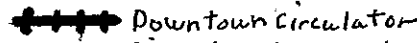
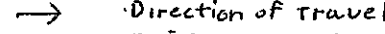
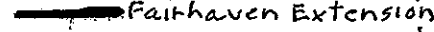
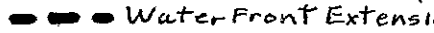
Old 1888  
C.N. St  
Depot

Circulator  
Turnaround

BELLINGHAM BAY

**NEW WHATCOM  
& FAIRHAVEN  
ELECTRIC RAILWAY**

Proposed Route

-  Downtown Circulator
-  Direction of Travel
-  Fairhaven Extension
-  Water Front Extension

Paul Kenna

February 2003

