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**HEADLINE:** Red Line backers say transit system could generate \$3.5B economic impact

Source Website

Baltimore Business Journal – by Scott Dance Staff

Carl W. 'Bill' Struever and Kenneth R. Banks, two men behind some of Baltimore's biggest developments, urged the business community Tuesday to help advance a plan for the Red Line as the \$1.6 billion transportation project nears consideration for federal funding.

They said it would mean 17,000 jobs for the region once construction begins and could help foster as much as \$3.5 billion in economic development. Both spoke at a rally held by the Greater Baltimore Committee, a regional business advocacy group.

Community support for the Red Line is key for landing federal dollars that are needed to help pay for the project. Public hearings seeking community feedback on potential Red Line routes concluded last month, enabling a final decision on a layout and a request for federal funds to happen early next year.

The Red Line is slated to go from Woodlawn east to Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, going through downtown, Harbor East, Fells Point and Canton. The GBC-backed Red Line plan would cost \$1.6 billion and includes two tunnels — one under Cooks Lane in western Baltimore and another from downtown to Fells Point.

Advocates hope the system can offer mass transit across an east-west axis of the city to complement its existing systems, the Light Rail and Metro subway systems. Project engineering is slated to begin in the spring and several years of construction is scheduled to start in 2013.

Banks, president of ***Banks Contracting Co.***, compared the city to transit hubs like New York, where public transportation has fueled the economy since the early 1900s.

'We're way behind,' he said.

He also emphasized the thousands of construction jobs the Red Line would create over the several years of construction. If that many jobs were on the horizon in another industry, the city would be clamoring for the influx, he said. Banks' company helped build the Hilton Convention Center hotel and is also working on the Science + Technology Park at Johns Hopkins development in East Baltimore.

Struever, CEO of Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse Inc., said he supports the Red Line route because it reflects where development is happening and people are concentrated. That's in contrast to the Light Rail, he said, which was completed in 1992 and brings many suburban workers to the city but doesn't go through some of Baltimore's largest neighborhoods. Struever's developments include the Can Company in Canton and the Bond Street Wharf in Fells Point, both of which would fall on the Red Line route.

Struever also said the Red Line would help bring together a more connected transit system that could also include a downtown shuttle slated for 2009, a proposed trolley along the Charles Street corridor and beefed-up commuter water taxi service.

The GBC is urging the business community to continue providing feedback to the Maryland Transit Administration on the different Red Line options. Public comments will be accepted until January 5, after which Gov. Martin O'Malley will choose a plan to forward on to the federal government.

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***Highlights: Banks Contracting Co***