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BG Trolley test drive raises expectations

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The new Bowling Green Trolley sits outside the Historic RailPark and Tr
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If the intent of Monday's test drive of the new Bowling Green Trolley was to raise expectations for the red-and-green vehicle's potential impact, then it was a success.

On an abbreviated trip through downtown and the Western Kentucky University campus, the diesel-powered trolley counted local tourism leaders, city and county officials and WKU President Timothy Caboni among the passengers that taxed its 33-person capacity.

The 30-minute trip led by local businessman Bobby Rabold – a trolley advocate for at least the past five years – was enough to impress riders like the WKU president.

“What a wonderful addition to our community,” Caboni said after the 2017 Freightliner trolley wound its way around Fountain Square Park and snaked through the WKU campus on a route that started and ended at the Historic RailPark and Train Museum. “It will take thousands of visitors through our campus.”

Bringing more visitors to town is the whole idea behind the trolley, according to Rabold.

“The goal is to increase tourism in Bowling Green,” said Rabold, who has for years been an advocate for a trolley similar to the electric-powered one that he said his grandfather Earl Rabold rode on rails through the city roughly a century ago. “We can pull off Interstate 65 some of the 22 million cars who pass by Bowling Green each year.”

Rabold’s enthusiastic pitch was enough to bring local tourism professionals on board and convince the majority of the Warren Fiscal Court magistrates to spend \$487,736 of the county’s federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to purchase the trolley and pay for the first-year operation of the vehicle.

Roughly half of that total – \$248,000 – went to purchase the trolley from Specialty Vehicles of Henderson, Nev., in September.

Much of the remainder will help the Historic RailPark and Train Museum, the de facto owner of the trolley, beef up its staff in order to support the new vehicle.

Jamie Johnson, RailPark executive director, said Monday that she will be bringing on new staff positions for marketing and trolley tour program management.

“Our plan is in motion,” Johnson said. “Those two positions are directly related to the trolley. I think we’re going to see an uptick in revenue because of the trolley.”





That uptick is expected to begin next spring, when the trolley's regular tours begin in earnest, but Johnson said the vehicle is already being utilized.

“It has already been out for weddings, the Veterans Day Parade, and for events at the National Corvette Museum,” she said. “We’ll use it at the Downtown Lights Up event and in the Christmas parade.”

Outside groups can rent the trolley for \$300 per hour, Johnson said, and plans call for the regular trolley trips to cost riders \$20 for a 90-minute trip.

Those tours will begin at the National Corvette Museum, travel to I-65 and enter Bowling Green via the

Cemetery Road interchange (exit 26).

From there the trolley will hit the RailPark, travel through downtown, wind through the WKU campus and make stops at the Downing Student Union, the Kentucky Museum and Martens Alumni Center before turning on to State Street and passing historic sites before heading back to the National Corvette Museum.

Although the schedule isn't yet final, Rabold expects the trolley to make that trip three times a day on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from April through October.

The trolley will leave from the Corvette museum at 10 a.m., 12 noon and 2 p.m., and riders will be able to "hop on and hop off" at the various stops, Rabold said.

When it isn't running its regular route, Rabold said, the trolley will be rented by local businesses or individuals for special events.

While Rabold, Johnson and others in the local tourist trade see the trolley as another tool for bringing visitors

to town, Caboni on Monday saw it as a potential recruiting vehicle.

Envisioning prospective students being exposed to the WKU campus through the trolley, Caboni quipped: “I hope everyone on the trolley is 18 years old.”

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