

## Pitkin County eyes new transit impact fee

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PITKIN COUNTY – Developers hoping to build homes in rural parts of Pitkin County might soon be required to pay a “transit impact fee,” designed to help offset any expansion of the local bus system caused by the development.

No one is sure how much it would be, or against exactly which kinds of development it would be assessed, but Pitkin County is preparing to suggest the idea to the Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC) at its meeting on April 16.

The EOTC is made up of officials from Pitkin County, Aspen and Snowmass Village, who meet regularly to figure out how to spend a half-cent sales tax assessed by Pitkin County.

“This is a new idea,” said the county’s public works director, Brian Pettet. “A dedicated transit impact fee would be based on the size of the development that’s going to happen ... and what kind of expansion of transit would be needed to serve that development.”

He said the basis for a fee likely would be dependent on such things as the location of a proposed development – whether it is far up a remote valley or relatively near an existing bus route – and the size of the project, which would affect the number of employees it would generate both during construction and afterward.

The idea has been batted around among county bureaucrats since last year, and would be a significant change from what is done currently.

According to officials from the county and the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, the current system involves case-by-case “exactions” assessed against developers as part of the approvals process.

Dan Blankenship, CEO of RFTA, said on Thursday that he had not been deeply involved in talks about the impact fee, and is not sure how it might affect the agency’s \$37 million budget.

He also said the agency is leery of regulations that tie such fees to specific acts on RFTA’s part, such as setting up a bus route serving an area where previously there was no bus.

“We don’t want to be forced into a position where we commit to providing service to rural developments,” he said, because that kind of service may not be warranted.

But, he said, it generally is accepted that growth brings more ridership onto RFTA buses, necessitating expansion of service, which increases the agency’s costs.

And, he said, “If people give us money, we are not going to turn it down. As long as it’s that general ... it will ultimately get invested in improving transit.”

According to Pettet, there is a potential problem with the idea of a transit impact fee applied only to homes built in Pitkin County. Many of the workers who would be employed in building the home, or as service workers once it is finished, live in communities outside Pitkin County, he said.

“It’s a complicated effort” to come up with a fair way to ensure that development pays its way in such cases, Pettet said.

“We want to make sure the fee is fair and directly tied to whatever expansion would be needed for RFTA” in connection with growth, he explained.

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