



Trolley Folly

Published on *Show-Me Institute* (<https://showmeinstitute.org>)



By: *Scott Tanner*

Show-Me Institute analysts have been a bit of a broken record on the Loop Trolley. But that's because the project was [ill-conceived](#) from the [start](#) , with numerous [mishaps](#) and [delays](#) along the way.

Recent news is unlikely to reassure those skeptical about the project. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [article](#) from last week shared some alarming numbers about the Loop Trolley:

Statistics released Tuesday showed the trolley sold 2,210 tickets in June, producing \$4,062 in revenue. That's up from 1,744 tickets and \$3,861 in revenue in May but less than the line's peak month of March, when 2,421 tickets were sold.

Overall since the trolley opened [last Nov. 16](#) , 11,364 tickets have been sold, producing farebox revenue of \$22,283.

These are not particularly impressive totals. They're nowhere close to what the public was promised when the project was being sold years ago. As the *Post-Dispatch* article mentions, back in 2015 trolley officials predicted 394,000 riders a year. In 2017, officials claimed the first year of operation (which was supposed to be 2018) would generate nearly \$400,000 in

revenue. The year isn't over yet, but you don't need a degree in math to see that things are off track.

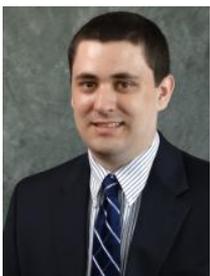
However, Kevin Barbeau, the executive director of the Loop Trolley Co., told the *Post-Dispatch* there are important caveats to keep in mind. The trolley has only been running four days a week, and the initial projections were based on a full seven-day-a-week schedule. The plan was to have three cars running, but because of delays, there are only two cars in service.

I'm sure that missing a car and only operating four days a week is hurting business. But whose fault is that? The extensive delays in acquiring and renovating the third trolley car can't be blamed on anyone but the Loop Trolley Co.

Even with optimistic projections, future revenue and ridership with three cars fully operational for seven days a week looks grim. If the trolley saw a *fifteen-fold* increase in revenue in the second half of the year, it would still fall short of its annual revenue goal. Barbeau claims secondary revenue sources from things like advertising and fundraising will pick up once the trolley is running on a daily basis. But based on all the broken promises and delays, it's hard to take trolley boosters at their word.

Keep in mind that most of the trolley's \$1.3 million annual operating budget comes from a special sales tax levied on Loop customers, which has raised on average \$780,000 a year since 2016. Taxpayers have been paying full freight for this project, despite the missing car and part-time operating schedule. If operating at half capacity is a valid excuse for missing ridership and revenue targets, shouldn't taxpayers get half their money back?

About the Author



Scott Tanner

Associate Editor

Scott Tanner is an Associate Editor with Show-Me Opportunity.

Read Online

<https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/trolley-folly>

Links

[1] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/trolley-folly>

[2] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/unscientific-claims-streetcar-boosters>

[3] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/straight-talk-about-loop-trolley>

[4] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/face-palm-loop-trolley-over-budget-likely-delayed>

-again

[5] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transportation/yet-another-chapter-loop-trolley-bungle>

[6] https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/loop-trolley-ridership-and-fare-revenue-lag-it-s-raised/article_c75e642c-c17e-5782-9bfc-9918657417e5.html#anchor_item_1

[7] https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/loop-trolley-s-first-day-a-bureaucratic-snafu-kept-it/article_c4010665-e5ba-5d76-acda-76c78d1bef0a.html

Mission Statement

Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

Show-Me Institute

5297 Washington Place	3645 Troost Avenue
Saint Louis, MO 63108	Kansas City, MO 64109
Phone: (314) 454-0647	Phone: (816) 287-0370
Fax: (314) 454-0667	

Email: info@showmeinstitute.org

Support Our Work

The Show-Me Institute is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Make your tax deductible contribution today: <http://ShowMeInstitute.org/donate>