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Forum explores future transportation

Ride-sharing programs, funding sources among topics at meeting today.

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What would a regional public transportation system in the Springfield area look like?

Inter-county buses? A network of vans? Light rail?

That will be the focus of a Regional Transportation Forum this afternoon, sponsored by the Ozarks Transportation Organization.

OTO Director Tim Conklin said speakers from around the state and the Springfield area will talk about how their systems work and the challenges they've faced.

"We're bringing in individuals from agencies that are already doing it to share their experiences," Conklin said.

Among the topics:

- Regional transit issues and challenges in the Kansas City area

- A van-pooling program offered by Kansas City Area Transportation Authority

- A new Web-based ride-match program for people who commute to Springfield, being developed by the OTO

- Updates about City Utilities Transit system and MSU Transit System

- A look at funding sources and state statutes that would affect regional transit systems

Conklin said the forum also will "begin the discussion on how to implement OTO's Transportation Development Plan."

The plan, recently approved by the OTO board, lays out a multi-step strategy to improve public transportation in Springfield and surrounding counties.

It includes some major changes in the way CU would operate its bus system, including fare hikes, a move to a grid-style route system and more service on evenings and weekends.

More significantly, the transit plan states CU and OTO should develop a "strategic plan for the creation of a stand-alone regional transit authority," an issue that would have to go before voters.

The strategic plan would include routes into outlying areas, modifications to existing transit routes and a plan for seeking public support for a regional system.

More details about the plan are at the OTO Web site:
www.ozarkstransportation.org/Documents/FinalTP08162007.pdf
