New mass transit may link UA to downtown student housing

By Jennifer Amsler

City officials are working to create a modern mass transportation system that would run through the UA to downtown Tucson, an area they say will soon be a magnet for student living.

Jim Glock, the director of the Tucson Department of Transportation, said an additional 2,000 housing units will pop up downtown in the next four years, making a reliable transportation system to the UA a necessity.

“There is no easy way to get around,” Glock said.

In their Transit on the Move plan, the city officials are considering either a modern streetcar, an expansion of the historic trolley on East University Boulevard, a rapid bus circulator or updates to the SunTran bus system.

Glock said one of these systems could be in operation by 2011.

The outlined path of one of these transportation systems would run from Arizona Health Sciences Center, through the UA on East Second Street to the downtown area.

Joan Beckim, community outreach and information coordinator for the Transit of the Move project, said UA representatives from facilities planning are supportive of an updated transportation system.

Beckim said the mass transit system would complement the CatTran system and possibly allow it to expand to other parts of campus.

Matthew Tauton, a consultant on the project’s team, said the transit system would operate 18 to 20 hours daily and connect students with activities in other parts of the city.

Marc K. Soronson, the consultant project manager, said city officials are relying heavily on student input because the new system will affect campus life.

“If we don’t have student support, it will not happen,” Soronson said.

Beckim said the City of Tucson will hold a forum on campus sometime in March so students can express their needs and concerns regarding travel.