

Laredo streets for sale to earn money for city

United Press International
LAREDO — The dusty streets of Laredo have been lyricized in songs and romanticized in old Western movies. Now, they're up for sale.

City fathers in the 92,000 resident border town, tired of Laredo's image as a holdover from wild West days, put up "for sale" signs on many worn-out and unused roadways in hopes of raising enough money to pave other, more well-traveled streets.

"Somewhere around 50 percent of our streets are unpaved," said City Councilman Felipe "Chilo" Sanchez, a Laredo native who helped devise the street sale idea last summer.

"We needed to start generating revenues to provide the community with a paving program," Sanchez said, "but we were hesitant to have a bond issue because the interest rate is so high right now. We felt that we had to find an alternative

method of paving streets other than having to float a bond and, my idea was, why don't we start selling streets that we're not using."

So far, two streets have been sold for \$33,000 each — one to a home improvement store and one to a retail development company — and deals are in the works for 18 other street sales that could total as much as \$600,000.

In most other Texas communities, such a sale would have been impossible since streets usually belong to abutting land owners with the cities owning easements for utility pipes or poles.

But Laredo was founded on a Spanish land grant, and the streets belong to the city.

"At this time, our ad valorem taxes bring in only about \$3.8 million a year," Sanchez said. "The sale of streets should be able to generate somewhere between \$5 million and \$7 million.

We figure paving a block will probably run between \$9,000 and \$10,000 — so that's a lot of streets."

The benefits to Laredo from the sale of its streets will not end there.

"We have public streets that we are not really using and we are not getting any ad valorem taxes out of them and not really letting anybody build or expand their businesses on these streets. Now, those businesses can purchase streets and extend their businesses, and that creates more taxable income for the city."

The Missouri-Pacific Railroad Co. is negotiating to buy 17 streets for about \$500,000 and the La Quinta Motor Inn is negotiating to purchase a street for \$101,000. Sanchez said the city will continue to offer certain streets for sale until the interest dwindles.



staff photo by Sumanesh Aggar

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Earth's magnetic field is potential electricity source

United Press International
HOUSTON — Scientists believe space is full of potential electricity that future space stations could tap simply by trailing a miles-long wire outside, sort of like Ben Franklin flying his kite on Earth.

The idea, taking advantage of the fact that Earth's magnetic field extends far into space, would mean space stations would not have to carry fuel cells, solar panels or other power-generating capacity into orbit with them.

They simply could pull power from space, which is not nearly as empty as it seems.

"The electricity is there just as it's in this wire," said Dr. Peter Banks of Stanford University, holding a piece of wire. "A system like this can provide power of 10 to 20 kilowatts for an orbiter and be stored in batteries.

"The calculations I get indicate that if you had a space operations center you could hang a tether above it 20 kilometers away and have a continual supply of energy."

Banks was one of the scientists with experiments aboard space shuttle Columbia's third flight.

He said the effect is the same thing that happens in an electric generator. A wire brush is moved through a magnetic field to generate electricity, which essentially is moving electrons.

In the case of the spaceship revolving around Earth, the planet provides the magnetic field naturally and the spaceship becomes the wire brush as it moves through. The result is moving electrons.

Banks said the system could be very energy efficient.

"What you need is a source of electrons (from a ship) and that can be done by a vacuum tube and break of cover and that gives you a source of electrons."

The electrons would be pulled from the ship via the "broken vacuum tube," he picked up the end of the tether, and down the miles-long tether to large numbers by the Earth's magnetic effect and, if desired, stored in a battery.

He said this passive electromagnetic power system could self-propel once in progress and the result would be considerable usable electrical power.

Banks said he doubts spacecrafts will go into orbit anytime soon without fuel cells at least as a backup: "You couldn't risk a micrometeorite hitting your tether short."

Banks also said there are some drawbacks. The generation of power that way would put an electromagnetic drag on the space station eventually forcing it out of orbit into the Earth's atmosphere, Banks said.

"But that works both ways and it could provide energy to raise the orbit," he said. "There's an electromotive effect to keep you in orbit."

Banks was seeing farther into a future that might include vehicles like cartoon characters Fearless Fosdick's magnetic machines.

Such theoretical machines would use the reverse of the power-generating process in an electric motor, taking advantage of the Earth's magnetic field to stay in orbit.

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