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Mass transit remains a compelling, local issue

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Mass transit is one of the most hotly debated issues of our time in the Indianapolis area, but there might be one point on which we can all agree: Its future is still very much in question.

The Indy Connect plan -- a \$2.4 billion proposal for rail, expanded bus service and other improvements throughout the metro area -- still awaits a hearing in the Indiana General Assembly, the first of several hurdles it must navigate to ever move off the drawing board.

Although the proposal has unprecedented support among civic leaders and the local business community, it would be debated during a legislative election year in which even the possibility of a tax hike would carry political risk.

Meanwhile, the city's IndyGo bus system -- long derided as one of the nation's weakest - is again at risk of running out of money.

Officials of the municipal agency say they face a \$6.4 million shortfall in 2012, raising the possibility of fare increases and cutbacks in even the present level of service.

Does mass transit still stand a chance in Indianapolis?

We've debated the topic several times in my weekly online chats on community issues, and we'll address that question this week, starting at 1 p.m. Friday at IndyStar.com/livechat.

I hope you can join us, but if you can't, send me an email or leave a phone message.

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