
Cable car project fast tracked through special committee

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Today, a special committee charged with expediting large-scale infrastructure projects held its first open discussion on the controversial cable car project. The cable car is planned to run between West Jerusalem (near Abu-Tor) and the not yet constructed Kedem Compound near the Dung Gate of the Old City, with an intermediary stop on Mount Zion. The State will invest 200 million shekels in a system designed to seamlessly connect the western part of the city with a constellation of Elad settler group managed tourism enterprises in Silwan.

If, as intended, the cable car becomes a primary means of transportation to the Old City, it will route masses of visitors to the compound Elad intends to establish as the headquarters of its decades long campaign to settle the neighborhood of Silwan.

At today's session, the mayor and director general of the Ministry of Tourism expressed strong support for the project, suggesting that the cable car is the only way to increase the volume of tourists in the Old City and claiming that it will serve the residents of Silwan.

Beyond doing an immeasurable disservice to the residents of Silwan by further legitimizing private settlement there, the project will violate building and planning regulations designed to protect the historical and physical integrity of the Old City and its surrounding walls. The cars and pillars will obstruct views to the World Heritage Site. Further, an additional floor extending at least 2.5 meters above the adjacent road and blocking views of the Old City will be added to the Kedem Compound, to be [located just 20 meters from the Old City walls](#). [Link for [background on Kedem](#) here].

In 2015, the Appeals Committee of the National Planning and Building Council issued a decision ordering planners to scale the area of the Kedem compound back by 50% due to its projected harm to outlooks and Old City archeological areas. Their instruction was negated [after Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked intervened to reverse the decision](#). Even in its final iteration, the height of what is planned to be a massive visitor center at the entrance to Silwan was lowered so as not to exceed the elevation of the road between it and the walls of the Old City.

The cable car project is another compelling example of state sponsored private settlement under the guise of tourism. Officials have circumvented the local and district planning committees to fast track the plan, transferring authority to the National Infrastructure Committee (NIC). The NIC was established to expedite approval of significant infrastructure projects and limit the role of the public to block problematic schemes. Until recently, tourism related projects were not discussed under its purview. About a year ago,

the Planning and Building Law was amended to enable its new function.

The cable car is the first tourism related project to be considered by the NIC. In future stages, the plan is expected to incorporate stops in the heart of Silwan (near the “Shiloah Spring”) and the Mount of Olives Cemetery. The Committee aims to approve the plan within one year and anticipates that once approved and construction launched, the project could be completed within a minimum of 15 months.

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