



SE Uplift
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28th July 2017

Mr. Neil McFarlane, TriMet
1800 SW 1st Avenue, Suite 300
Portland, OR 97201

Dear Mr. McFarlane:

On behalf of Southeast Uplift, we respectfully ask that TriMet reaffirm its interest in and commitment to purchasing battery-electric buses for the Division Transit Project.

We all — neighborhoods, City of Portland, county governments, State of Oregon, and TriMet — recognize the climate imperatives to change the way we have done things, as well as the role that alternative propulsion systems can play in shifting the balance toward more resilient systems. So it seems unnecessary to reiterate here the specific benefits and costs associated with battery-electric and diesel buses. What is necessary, given the timeline of this project, is that we work harder and faster towards that future.

It was not so long ago that TriMet was recognized as a trailblazer and technological leader as the first agency to purchase low-floor light rail cars, ahead of any other jurisdiction in North America. The agency also pioneered the use of a NASCAR-inspired electronic cooling system on its buses to improve fuel efficiency. Today you have an opportunity to again be a leader by taking the necessary steps to make this cleaner option happen.

We understand that some actions are already in the works — an electric-bus pilot project, redesigning and rewiring the Powell Garage, an assessment by the Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), and partnering with PGE — and we trust that these are being taken up with the same sense of urgency and opportunity that we feel and that other West Coast transit agencies are exhibiting. As you know, King County Metro (Seattle) plans to buy only electric buses starting in 2020.

Furthermore, technological advances in battery technology and a dramatic decline in wholesale electric prices will also make battery-electric buses a cost effective solution. Assuming recharging could be accomplished at night, the observed gradual decline of off-peak prices towards zero makes this an even more attractive proposition.

As of this writing, our board has received advocacy requests and endorsements calling for battery-electric buses from: South Tabor, Richmond, Sunnyside, and the Hosford-Abernethy Neighborhood District.

For our part, we would like to move beyond letter writing and join you in pursuit of this modest but valuable goal we share. Let's have a constructive conversation about how to make this happen.

We believe that TriMet has a wonderful opportunity with the Division Transit Project to engage the community in solving problems, setting priorities, and clarifying the level of risk we want the agency to assume in balancing better transit, livability, equity, and climate action. To this end, we would like to see more focused community engagement on the topic of bus electrification.

Through our representative on the Community Advisory Committee, we have asked for regular (monthly) updates on the steps TriMet is taking to make sure electric buses could happen on the project. While the committee's recent focus has been directed to station placement and design, we would like to reiterate our request. Most helpful would be to see a working list of the challenges to putting battery-electric buses on the Division line and to present monthly briefings to the CAC on what TriMet is doing to address each of them.

We would also welcome a forum that brings together local governments, TriMet (planners, fleet manager, union), and neighborhoods along with experts, other transit agencies, and even manufacturers to talk specifically about bus electrification. This could take place at one of the monthly Division Transit Project meetings this fall or be a separate event altogether.

Finally, we ask that TriMet commit to purchasing battery-electric vehicles for the initial fleet of thirty-three 60' articulated buses for the Division Transit Project. We understand that you cannot guarantee an outcome on this procurement and that there are factors beyond your control, but TriMet can commit to working on those things that are within its scope to make electric buses feasible within the timeframe of this project.

Sincerely,



Reuben Deumling, Terry Dublinski-Milton
Co-Chairs, Southeast Uplift Board of Directors

cc: Governor Brown, Portland City Council, Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, Metro Council, Trimet Board of Directors

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