



PUBLIC COMMENTS: MBTA FMCB MEETING

SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

Hello, good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to provide public comments. I'm Veena Dharmaraj from the Massachusetts Chapter of the Sierra Club and I'm speaking on behalf of our 100, 000 members and supporters.

First, we are very excited to have 5 zero emission electric buses in operation on the Silver Line. Many of us have tried to get a ride on the electric bus but they remain as elusive as the new Orange Line trains, so we need more of them and soon. We also commend MBTA for deploying the buses on routes that run through Chelsea, a community impacted by poor air quality and high asthma rates. We see this as a first step to a much speedier transition to a zero-emission bus fleet. However, the decision to test these buses for two years before deciding on future procurements not only delays this transition, it lacks a sense of urgency required to address the climate crisis. As you already know, transitioning to an electric bus fleet is a multi-year, multi-step process and every day that we delay in setting actionable targets towards this transition takes us further away from our climate goals.

Without a commitment and a timeline for full fleet electrification, new buses deployed in the interim will continue to run on fossil fuels and their emission and air pollution impacts will be felt for 12 or more years that those buses are in service. For example, since 2017 MBTA has purchased 175 CNG buses and around 400 diesel hybrid buses. In comparison 5 electric buses were added to the fleet and only 35 of the over 750 buses bus procurements planned in the next five years is electric. More electric buses should be added to the service today as old buses are retired, especially in communities that are hardest hit by air pollution.

We cannot afford to delay further deployment. There is already a lot of data available from the electric buses running in Worcester, Pioneer Valley and Martha's Vineyard and in other cold weather cities like Chicago, Philadelphia and New York that can help inform procurement decisions and routes that are best suited for electrification today.

Further, there have been no updates on the electric bus feasibility study in the two years since it was initiated. We request a timeline for its release and urge that it lay out a clear pathway for a phased transition to an electric bus fleet.

We request more information on the timeline and propulsion technologies being considered for two bus procurements mentioned in the 2020-2024 CIP—one for 325 buses from New Flyer and a second procurement of 460 buses.

Finally, MBTA must act with urgency to address the condition and capacity of the bus maintenance facility network prioritizing the health and safety of workers at the garage. The Quincy and Albany garages are functionally obsolete and according to the MBTA are in the most urgent need for replacement. These garages also house around 300 of the oldest diesel buses in the MBTA fleet that are due to be replaced starting 2022.

To improve public health and lower emissions, it is crucial that the buses to replace this diesel fleet are electric and that the new maintenance facilities to replace these garages are equipped for electric bus technology.

We look forward to working with MBTA and urge MBTA to act fast and boldly by changing the direction of investment in the bus fleet to electric buses.