



MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

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DOCKET

09-ALT-1

DATE AUG 03 2010

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August 3, 2010

Commissioner James Boyd
California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Re: Docket No. 09-ALT-1
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

RE: Personal Rapid Transit Pilot Demonstration Program

Dear Commissioner Boyd:

As Mayor of the City of Santa Cruz, California, I write to urge the Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Technology Program to provide funding for Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) demonstration projects to assess this potential technology's energy efficiency, greenhouse gas mitigation effectiveness, and potential to change mass transit as we think about it today.

The City of Santa Cruz is a coastal community of 58,000 people that accommodates millions of summer visitors to the world-famous Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and is home to the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) campus with 20,000 students and approximately 4,000 faculty and staff. Although Santa Cruz has a very good bus system that is operated by the Santa Cruz METRO, the City and the Santa Cruz METRO are under severe financial pressures to continue the current level of service.

The City of Santa Cruz has been following the development of the PRT industry for several years and is intrigued by the potential benefits of such a transportation system. The City has funded a literature review of the current state of the industry in 2006, hosted a PRT conference in 2006, and advertised and received several responses to a City-issued Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for firms to design and operate (at no cost to the City) a PRT demonstration project for the City of Santa Cruz in 2008. Unfortunately, due to the economy, the City has not been able to

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spend much staff time on this project, as we have furloughed our workforce 10 percent and are focusing on providing basic services.

One thing that is apparent from briefly reviewing the qualifications that we did receive in response to the RFQ is that the PRT industry is still evolving and there desperately needs to be a test facility in the United States to prove or disprove the viability of the PRT technology for use in the United States. In addition, there is a great need to develop a sustainable operational model that will work with existing transit networks to improve the cost effectiveness of the entire system. As you know, mass transit is heavily subsidized and requires a subsidy for every rider. Clearly this is not a long-term sustainable model. The proponents of PRT advertise that the low construction and operational costs of the system are significantly more cost effective than buses and light rail, and PRT could work together with either existing systems to improve the cost effectiveness of the entire transportation network. If we are successful in getting people to change their behavior and get out of their cars, there needs to be a system that is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the user like their car, but is safely separated from pedestrians, bicycles, and other vehicles. The proponents of PRT claim that PRT does address a number of these requirements.

I understand that there is an operating PRT test facility in Sweden, and the first operational facility at Heathrow Airport is starting to come online soon. We continue to learn from these facilities, but as you know the United States has very different safety standards and cultural expectations. Having a test facility in the United States will provide the needed facility to address a lot of the unanswered questions about the viability of PRT in United States cities and allow United States workers to participate in the evolution of the transportation industry.

The latest generation of PRT technology is currently under development at NASA, Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California. UCSC has several researchers working with NASA on this latest technology to develop an operational model of the PRT system. Several university programs in the United States are researching advanced power electronic systems for PRT that capture wind and solar energy and use today's station batteries and fuel cells for energy storage. Clearly there is a lot of research going on, and a test facility would significantly advance this effort and move PRT from research technology to an operational system that cities such as Santa Cruz could consider in the near future.

I respectfully request that the California Energy Commission's Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Technology Program fund a PRT test facility.

Sincerely,



Mike Rotkin
Mayor