



March 9, 2021

Submitted electronically to

Rep. Jamie Long, Chair of the House Climate and Energy Committee rep.jamie.long@house.mn
Rep. Frank Hornstein, Chair of the House Transportation Committee rep.frank.hornstein@house.mn
Rep. Rick Hansen, Chair of the House Environment Committee rep.rick.hansen@house.mn
Rep. Fue Lee, Chair of the House Capital Investment Committee rep.fue.lee@house.mn

Re: Met Council / Metro Transit Biodiesel Bus Procurement

Dear Chairs Lee, Long, Hansen, and Hornstein,

We are asking you and your respective committees to bring attention to a recent proposal of the Metropolitan Council to [authorize the procurement of 143 biodiesel buses](#). Each of you have already expressed concern about this proposal - and we appreciate that.

Quick legislative oversight is needed now to prevent the Met Council from moving backward on both climate and equity with this shortsighted procurement. Most immediately, Met Council should delay taking this action until key questions are answered.

Climate Impact of Transit

We appreciate that transit service, even as it is currently powered, is hugely beneficial to the climate. We understand the best way to maximize the climate benefits of transit is to get more people to ride it. But we also know we will never achieve climate stability until we reach net zero emissions. That means government agencies generally, and Met Council specifically, must lead by example and move aggressively toward cleaner, electric transit.

Transparency & Unanswered Questions

The bottom of Met Council's Business Item reads as follows, "There is no known opposition to the proposed action." Now that people know about it, that's not true. A long list of organizations signing this letter are seeking basic transparency and answers to reasonable questions regarding such a large expenditure of public dollars.

Before making a decision, Met Council should be able to provide a complete comparison of the costs and full lifecycle climate impacts of the various bus options.

- We need to see a comparison of **tailpipe emissions** from diesel or biodiesel buses, hybrid buses and fully electric buses)
- We also need a full **lifecycle analysis** of these options. This should take into account the climate impacts of growing and processing crops into biodiesel over the expected life of these vehicles.
- We also need a **comparison of direct costs** including the cost of fuel over time. This should include a complete accounting (an audit) of all costs related to using biodiesel instead of regular diesel.
- We also need a **comparison of indirect costs** including the broader societal costs including medical expenses which results from continuing to burn fossil fuels.

Met Council has time to provide transparency and answer these questions. It has been suggested that Met Council must move forward with this purchase of 143 buses to serve Orange Line BRT, as well as D Line and METRO B Line arterial BRT projects. That is nonsensical since Orange Line BRT will require less than 20 buses. D Line will be under construction into 2022 and B Line into 2024.

Abandoning Electrification in Favor of Biodiesel

Metro Transit's commitment in 2018 to electrify its fleet was a step in the right direction Nobody expected that to happen overnight. But it must not be abandoned.

If the Met Council authorizes procurement of 143 biodiesel Metro Transit buses and zero electric buses, it would be investing over \$121M in continued reliance on imported fossil fuel and big agriculture, at the expense of a cleaner future and cleaner air for people who ride transit and/or live, work or go to school along transit corridors and who have disproportionately low incomes and/or are people of color.

This action the Met Council is poised to take would reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of how different technologies impact the climate over time.

Fully electric vehicles are superior to either biodiesel or gasoline/electric hybrids in terms of climate impact. This is not just because of electric vehicles' (EVs) lack of tailpipe emissions. Fully electric vehicles are already significantly less polluting today, based on both the inherently better efficiency of electric drive trains and the current electricity supply which is already greener than in the past due to expanded use of renewable energy like solar and wind.

This existing advantage for EVs *will only grow even more dramatically* as our electric grid continues to get less polluting. The sooner we achieve a greater market shift to full EVs, the more we can take advantage of an ever cleaner electric supply.

By contrast, *biodiesel vehicles emit more climate pollution from their tailpipes now - and they always will*. Furthermore, we must consider the full lifecycle of biofuels. When we factor in the climate pollution that comes from the production of biofuels, it becomes even more clear that biofuels are just another polluting form of dirty internal combustion technology we must move away from. This is not to say there is no role for biofuels in transportation's future, but it should be limited to heavy vehicles like construction equipment or aviation where no superior electric alternative exists.

Biodiesel is the Wrong Choice for Communities of Color

Every new biodiesel bus locks us into a minimum of 12 more years of dirty exhaust, climate pollution, and reliance on imported fossil fuel. This kind of long-term commitment to an outdated technology would perpetuate and exacerbate existing racial and economic disparities in the public health impacts of transportation pollution. People who ride transit or live near the most heavily used transit corridors are disproportionately low income people and/or people of color. They are also more likely to be affected by the cumulative impacts of pollution from non-transit vehicles and pollution generally.

Biodiesel is the Wrong Choice for Public Health

Multiple studies show the huge cost to public health from continued reliance on fossil fuels, including this [recent study](#) published in Environmental Research from Vohra et al. Local impacts are significant. "Air pollution in the Twin Cities contributes to about 2,000 premature deaths every year, and sends 1,000 people to the hospital for asthma, lung and heart disease treatments," according to an analysis by the Minnesota Health Department and the MN Pollution Control Agency published in the [StarTribune](#).

Biodiesel Harms Water Quality

Biofuels are also polluting Minnesota's waters, threatening the health of our people and ecosystems. Both ethanol and soy-based diesel additives in use today are a product of conventional row crop agriculture systems that rely on high rates of fertilizer. This fertilizer runs off into surface waters and infiltrates into our ground waters with disastrous effects. Nitrate pollution, caused primarily by this application of fertilizer to energy crops like corn and soy, is leaving a wake of contaminated private wells and municipal water supplies that are too polluted to drink. The MPCA estimates that 72% of the nitrogen polluting Minnesota's surface water originates from such row crop agriculture.

As a state, we can't adopt solutions to one problem only to create another. We must do better.

Symptom of a Larger Problem

We likely would not be having this conversation but for the lack of gubernatorial leadership when it comes to transit generally, which can be seen in declining willingness to champion urgently needed new ongoing revenue for transit in the metro area. Two years ago, Governor Walz inexplicably proposed a very modest 1/8 metro sales tax. That proposal was a 75% reduction from his predecessor.

The need to address climate has not fallen 75% in two years. And now, Governor Walz's operating budget includes little for climate and nothing for transit expansion. Minnesotans who care about climate and equity must once again rely on you, the House, to show leadership.

If we are serious about climate, this is not optional. There is no data to suggest we could possibly address emissions in the transportation sector through electrification of cars, trucks, and SUVs alone. We must reduce Vehicles Miles Travelled (VMT) by finally providing people real choices for how to get around.

If the Governor would propose, and the legislature would pass, a significant transit funding package, Metro Transit could transition towards full electrification of its fleet as part of building out a full Bus Rapid Transit network. Sooner or later, the climate crisis is going to force us to build out a Bus Rapid Transit system. It does not make sense to delay that network expansion or to now step backward from full, timely electrification of that network.

Conclusion

It's 2021. The [IPCC Special Report](#) tells us we have just a few years to make a hard pivot away from permanently polluting technologies like biodiesel. We are out of time for expensive "bridge" or "transition" technologies which have minimal benefits and really serve only to delay us from moving directly to the carbon-free transportation future we must embrace.

Sincerely,



Steve Morse
Executive Director

A.C.E.S.

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Cooperative Energy Futures*

CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)

Friends of the Mississippi River

Humming for Bees*

Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Izaak Walton League - MN Division

League of Women Voters Minnesota

Lutheran Advocacy Minnesota

MN350

Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light

Minnesota Ornithologists Union

Minnesota Well Owners Organization

MoveMinnesota

Northern Waters Land Trust

Sierra Club - North Star Chapter

Our Streets Minneapolis

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Resilient Cities & Communities

Twin Cities Riders Union*

Vote Climate

** Indicates not an MEP member*

cc: Governor Tim Walz
Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan
Charles Sutton
Alexis Donath

Metropolitan Council Chair Charles Zelle
Metropolitan Council Member Judy Johnson
Metropolitan Council Member Reva Chamblis
Metropolitan Council Member Christopher Ferguson
Metropolitan Council Member Deb Barber
Metropolitan Council Member Molly Cummings
Metropolitan Council Member Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson
Metropolitan Council Member Robert Lilligren
Metropolitan Council Member Abdirahman Muse
Metropolitan Council Member Raymond Zeran
Metropolitan Council Member Peter Lindstrom
Metropolitan Council Member Susan Vento
Metropolitan Council Member Francisco Gonzalez
Metropolitan Council Member Chai Lee
Metropolitan Council Member Kris Fredson
Metropolitan Council Member Phillip Sterner
Metropolitan Council Member Wendy Wulff