

May 31, 2004

Edmonton City Council  
Transportation and Public Works Committee  
#1 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
Edmonton, AB  
T5J 2R7

Dear Committee Members,

**RE: Terms of Reference (“Project Charter”) for the Trolley Bus Operation Review 2003**

The Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board would like to confirm receipt of the Terms of Reference (“Project Charter”) for the *Trolley Bus Operation Review 2003* following the March 16<sup>th</sup> Transportation and Public Works Meeting.

As we indicated at the meeting, these Terms of Reference were not made available to us in a timely manner, so we are now left in the unfortunate position to comment after the fact, rather than being able to have meaningful input. Please accept this letter as our commentary.

The Terms of Reference clearly focus on “standardization”, as stated in the purpose, “...to investigate the current and continued viability of trolley bus operations and the possible economic benefits of increased standardization within the Edmonton Transit System’s fleet”. The entire scope of the exercise is thus focused on the economic benefits of standardization, framing the context of any study and any possible conclusions or recommendations. It is implied that “standardization advantages” have a direct impact on viability. At the outset, the viability of the LRT units and community buses are exempted from consideration in this light so that one cannot make an argument for eliminating them as “oddities” in the fleet to derive additional cost savings. This leaves only the full-size trolley and diesel fleets.

“Standardization” itself cannot be said to determine the “viability” of any transit system, although it may exert an influence on relative costs. There are thousands of transit systems around the world that operate mixed fleets of different makes and models of buses, trolley buses, streetcars, light rail, etc., without this variety impacting their “viability”. “Standardization” also need not intrinsically imply eliminating trolley buses. It might simply call for vehicles that have a similarity of some components such chassis/bodies (as is the case with the current trolleys and GM diesels) so that the number of different parts to be stocked is reduced.

However, the Terms of Reference do not allow “standardization” to be achieved in any other manner but an all motorized (diesel) fleet. They narrowly define what kinds of standardization are permitted with a set of “viability factors”. These include such items as “opportunities presented by reconfiguration of routes without overhead power restrictions”, “garage location flexibility and overhead infrastructure” and “overhead power line aesthetics”. Defining these and other similar items as “viability factors” automatically excludes the trolley bus from falling within the realms of what any analysis can consider “viable”. If these items were truly viability factors in using trolley

buses, most of the 360 cities in the world that use trolley buses would not be using them. A qualified consultant surely would understand the true factors that dictate the viability of trolley buses, and not need to be provided with definitions to predetermine what he could deem viable.

In light of this “standardization” focus, one can, for example, posit an explanation for why the consultants’ maintenance analysis overlooks the fact that its data show older diesel buses cost more to maintain than the present trolley fleet: The diesel buses meet the Charter’s presets for “standardization” and “viability” (regardless of their cost); the trolleys do not.

On page 2, the objective of the consultants’ study is further refined, “...to provide *sufficient* information and analysis to *substantiate a recommendation* on the *immediate* future of the bus fleet operations and management strategy.” These refinements narrow the focus of the scope and deliverables to the extent that the consultant accepting the contract is left with few alternatives. In fact, the above statement could be taken to imply that the recommendation being substantiated had already been already formulated before the consultant was hired.

The ETS Advisory Board found that the study omits a number of analyses that are specified in the Terms of Reference and wonders why administration accepted the study in the absence of these items. The Terms of Reference include “forecasted operating costs and complexity”, “public health impact” and “life cycle costing”; all of which were either not performed at all or not performed in any detail. The Administrative Report to the September 16th Transportation and Public Works Committee meeting stated that the “benefits” of trolley bus operation would be considered in the study. The Terms of Reference specify nothing about considering the benefits of the trolley bus at all; they only refer to the benefits of fleet standardization.

To summarize, we believe the Terms of Reference for the 2003 Trolley Bus Operations Review too narrowly defines the objectives, focus and scope of the review—to the extent of predetermining the outcomes. Any resulting consultant’s review will be uninspired and almost scripted. The deliverables will inevitably support the recommendation that the viability of a smaller trolley fleet is questionable and that there are economic benefits with the operation of a standardized fleet. Such a narrow scope is not appropriate to generating an “independent”, “comprehensive” or “objective” analysis of such a serious issue as the future of trolley buses in Edmonton.

The ETS Advisory Board does not object to finding ways within the operation of the City to economize. However, there is more to the trolley vs. diesel issue than the simple economics of “fleet standardization”. These other issues need to be examined objectively, and this now proves difficult in the presence of a study and recommendation, written with only one clear direction in mind.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Graham Feltham  
Chair, ETS Advisory Board