Edmonton Trolley Coalition
"Sustainable Transit for Liveable Communities"

# MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

## Recommendations to Keep Trolleys Released

*Alternative Proposal for Trolleys Ensures City's Sustainability*

The Edmonton Trolley Coalition, a non-profit citizens' group comprised of transit professionals, engineers, community activists and members of the public, released today a series of recommendations on Edmonton's trolley bus system that will minimize the environmental impact and maximize the future sustainability of our transit system.

The plan calls for the retention of Edmonton's current trolley system, but also for serious study into its expansion. "We have spent the last months reviewing the data presented by the city administration. We have compared Edmonton's experience to other cities, and we have taken a careful look at future energy costs. We concluded that trolley buses are an opportunity, not a liability for our city," said Brian Tucker, chair of the Coalition. "We believe that our recommendations to council are environmentally and financially responsible."

In light of rising oil costs, the Coalition believes it is important to look at other sustainable energy options to reduce Edmonton's dependence on oil. With millions invested in existing infrastructure for the trolley system, the group believes the city should not only look at maximizing utilization, but consider expansion as well.

The Edmonton Trolley Coalition acknowledges that the current trolley fleet is old and due for replacement. Just as older diesel buses are being replaced with new low floor vehicles, Tucker says it is important that the city embraces the clean, efficient electric technology and replace the old trolleys with new low floor trolleys. Investing in green energy gives Edmonton a chance to make the trolley system truly zero-emissions, and this same concept can apply to other electric modes such as the LRT.

Increasing and extending the benefits of trolleys to other areas of the city is something the Coalition would like to see in the future. This move would enhance the quality of life in many neighbourhoods as well as in areas not currently served by trolleys. "Extending the trolley network to key transit centres, such as Northgate, would help displace many diesel buses from cross-town route 9," said Tucker.

Tucker and his group would welcome the opportunity to work together with Edmonton Transit management, city administration, and communities to run the trolley network in the most efficient way possible.

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Backgrounder Attached: Recommendations for Council
Questions and Answers

## Backgrounder

The Edmonton Trolley Coalition recommends to Edmonton City Council that:

1. **Edmonton Transit continue to operate trolleys and procure a new fleet of trolley buses to replace the existing fleet as soon as possible.**

*Our old trolleys are due for replacement. In light of the near certainty of much higher fuel prices, concerns over errors in the city administration's cost projections and the environmental opportunities electric vehicles bring, replacing these vehicles with new trolleys is the right choice. Quality-of-life associated with the quieter operation and zero street-level emissions of trolley buses is a huge benefit. No other city in North America is looking at abandoning electric vehicles. The recommendation from the city administration to abandon trolley buses is completely out of step with industry trends.*

2. **Edmonton Transit be directed to make maximum use of its trolley bus fleet and overhead wire infrastructure.**

*Maximizing use is essential to operating trolley buses. Trolleys have lower variable costs (energy, maintenance) but higher fixed costs (purchase cost, overhead wire infrastructure). Maximizing use of trolleys maximizes the benefit of lower variable costs while ensuring that fixed costs are divided over a larger service base. In Edmonton, costs associated with running trolleys have been inflated by very poor utilization of our trolley system; we have the opportunity to do a much better job.*

3. **Edmonton Transit be directed to investigate the possibility of purchasing green energy for its trolley bus and light rail systems.**

*One of the biggest strengths of electric vehicles is that they are "flexible-fuel" vehicles; that is, electricity can be generated in a number of different ways. Investing in green power sources makes electric vehicles like trolleys and LRT true zero-emission vehicles. No other vehicle technology can match that. There are other benefits as well: in Calgary, the "Ride the Wind" program has proven successful at attracting a huge number of people to public transit. In Vancouver, investing in renewable energy to power trolley buses gave that city leverage to secure additional capital funding from other levels of government. In a time of increasing environmental awareness, green-powered trolleys are the best environmental choice.*

4. **A committee, consisting of city staff, community representatives and stakeholders be struck to review and make recommendations to council on:**
    a. **Opportunities to make maximum use of the trolley system**
    b. **Opportunities to expand the trolley system**

*The opportunity to reduce costs further comes with greater utilization of the trolley system. A collective group with expertise from many areas may greatly benefit the city, allowing extensive discussion and exploration of these opportunities. With input from a variety of stakeholders, benefits of trolleys can be increased and further developed to reach other core areas of the city.*

## Questions and Answers

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of trolley buses?**

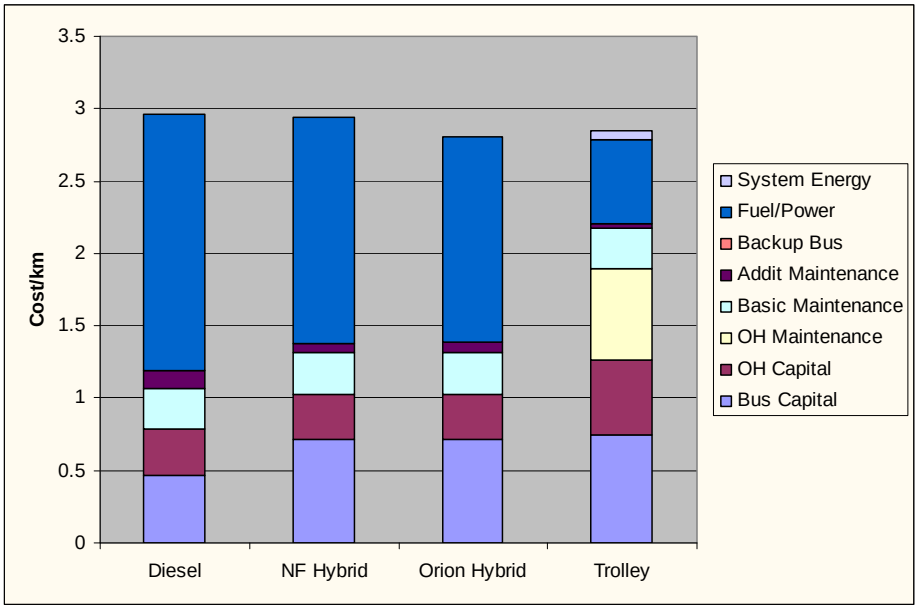
| Advantage | Disadvantage | What needs to be done |
|---|---|---|
| Lower variable costs | Higher fixed costs | Maximize usage of trolleys |
| Route permanence | Aesthetic impacts of overhead wires | Ensure wires are installed with sensitivity to their surroundings |
| Zero in-street emissions | Regional emissions | Invest in green power to make trolleys truly zero-emission |
| Redesigned poles, backup power, and automatic retrievers | Dewirements, blockages | Utilize technology on modern trolleys to greatly reduce chance of dewirements and delays |
| Lower noise levels | | Minimize use of diesel buses where alternative is available |

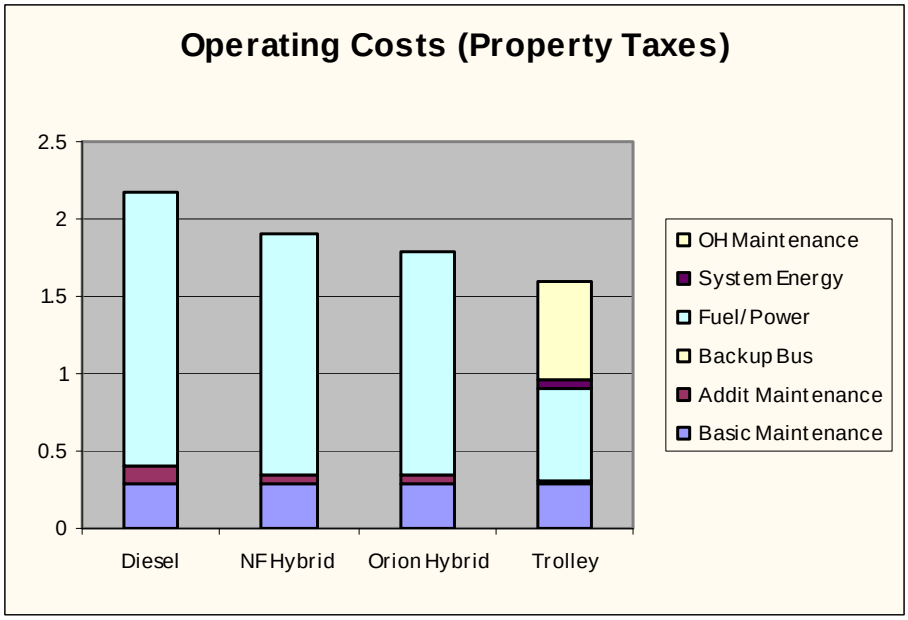
**Aren't trolleys more expensive?**

Not necessarily. With increased use of the trolley network, costs for infrastructure are divided over a larger number of buses, resulting in a lower cost per bus. Also, we have seen sharply increasing fuel prices over the past decade and they continue to rise.

Assumptions made in administrative reports regarding cost data are open to uncertainty, and $100 million in savings is questionable. Taking other scenarios for operating trolleys into account was not explored thoroughly, and fuel costs used to calculate costs are already outdated.

This alternative scenario, for instance, assumes $2.50/L diesel fuel (as presented by Dr. Checkel) and 3.5 million trolley kilometres (as per the ETS Ridership Growth Strategy) annually. It also corrects some figures and reduces overhead capital costs:






**Aren't trolleys bad for the environment because of coal power?**

No. If anything, diesel is inherently worse. Upstream emissions, such as energy used to power the oilsands extraction and production, refining, and transportation of diesel fuel, were not considered.

Trolleys currently represent 0.006% of the electricity demand in Alberta in 2006, with demand on the grid growing annually by about 5%. There is currently a growing trend towards green energy. Investing in green power sources, such as wind power, enable electric vehicles like trolleys and LRT to be true zero emission vehicles. No other vehicle technology can match that.

If trolleys were powered with green power, approximately 240 hybrids would be required to equal emissions reductions of 47 trolleys!

**Are fuel prices going to rise?**

Almost certainly yes, and drastically so. As the world reaches peak oil production, the supply of easily attainable oil will decrease. With ever increasing demand, including that of developing countries, the discrepancy between supply and demand will cause prices to increase.

Transit needs to be ahead of the curve in this regard. Increasing prices will drive more riders to transit, but that won't do any good if transit can't afford to increase service. Some U.S. systems are already cutting service because of unaffordable fuel prices.

**Aren't hybrid buses a solution for rising fuel prices?**

Hybrids have been purchased in many areas to replace diesel buses, not trolleys. If we replaced trolleys with hybrids, we would have to buy roughly 400 before we were consuming less fuel overall.

The fact that hybrids still depend on fossil fuels must be considered. It has also been shown in many recent studies that fuel savings are not as great as originally claimed.

**Wouldn't we be better off investing in LRT?**

LRT is a key transportation mode in our city, and trolleys should be viewed in a similar light – as another mode of transportation. We cannot view this as an either/or proposition. We need to have *more* electric mobility, not less. Trolleys complement the LRT system, reaching areas where it is not feasible to implement LRT.

Spending money on LRT is not necessarily a cost savings—and, if it is, it likely is not enough to build any significant amount of rail. LRT and trolleys serve different roles in the transit system. Each is important to make the system more sustainable as a whole.

**Wouldn't we be better off using the money that would be spent on trolleys on increased transit service throughout the city?**

No, for a few reasons. First, the Ridership Growth Strategy will cause trolley costs to drop, as the utilization of the system will increase. Also, the savings claimed over 20 years are not even close to the amount of money that the Ridership Growth Strategy would need over just 5 years.

Additionally, there is funding available from other levels of government that would provide for infrastructure costs like trolley bus overhead. This would reduce or eliminate a portion of costs coming from the city's funding. These funds would not be available for general transit operations.

Funding for green powered initiatives is also available. Only electric vehicles could take advantage of this money and would help reduce costs further, increasing the cost benefits.

Sustainability of the transit system in general is an important point to consider. There is no point buying more buses if we won't be able to afford to operate them in a few years.