



Community Letter on Alternative Fuel Buses

Dear City Council, City Manager Sam Sanders, Director of Transit Garland Williams, and City staff Kristel Riddervold, Emily Irvine, and Ben Chambers --

Our transportation system can be a catalyst for combating climate change and uplifting community health. It has a profound influence on both our environment and our well-being. The Community Climate Collaborative (C3) underscores these connections in its latest report on [Climate Change and Health](#).

Today, we face a profound choice, and as stewards of our community's destiny, your decisions ripple through generations. The impending City Council vote to determine the alternative fuel technology for Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) demands our unwavering attention.

Readily available zero-emission buses (ZEBs), particularly battery electric buses (BEBs), offer a tangible stride toward building a healthier environment and addressing societal imbalances. Delve into [C3's guide](#) for insights into this transition's significance and logistics.

As articulated in last year's [ACT on Climate!](#) letter, this vote is only one facet of the broader transportation enhancements needed. As a community, we know that in addition to ZEBs, CAT must enhance accessibility, safety at bus stops, route frequency, waiting times, route efficiency, and service diversity.

Now, in this pivotal moment, the impending vote pertains to the fuel source. We urge you to embrace these two recommendations, steering our transit, health, and climate future:

- **Choose Zero-Emission Buses (ZEBs) for CAT's Fuel Technology:** Vehicles powered by internal combustion engines, such as diesel or compressed natural gas buses, yield health issues from asthma to premature mortality. Amplifying this concern, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods bear a disproportionate pollution burden.
- **Ensure Workforce Investments for ZEB Operation and Maintenance:** The success of this transition rests on investment in just and robust workforce readiness.

Your commitment to community well-being and to our shared Earth is commendable.

Sincerely,
Charlottesville Area Residents and Members of the Nonprofit and For-Profit Community

December 2023

Partnering Organizations



Endorsements From Community Residents

As of December 12st, 2023, the petition letter was endorsed by **641 signatories** and included **nearly 200 comments**. Of the signatories, **91% live in Charlottesville or Albemarle County**.

Comments of endorsing community members included:

- "Please vote for zero-emission buses. As a resident who lives along a bus route and who is a regular bike commuter downtown, ZEB's will reduce the amount of both air and noise pollution I encounter in my day-to-day. Thank you for considering a better quality of life for me and other Charlottesville-Albemarle residents."
- "CNG buses are fossil fuel buses. While they may emit less CO2 than diesel models, they emit other greenhouse gases that are exponentially more potent than CO2. Battery electric buses are the clear choice, especially given current federal funding for buses and infrastructure. The long-term savings on fuel, parts and maintenance will benefit Charlottesville's budget and its taxpayers."
- "The Union representing CAT employees strongly urges the City to adopt zero emissions buses. We ask that existing maintenance staff be trained to maintain the new equipment."
- "Investing in these buses should be a no-brainer: it benefits health (both of people and the environment), improves social justice, reduces fuel costs, AND allows C'ville to serve as a model that other cities will inevitably follow as the US becomes more eco-conscious. Wouldn't it be better to proactively make this switch—and be seen as a city at the forefront of 'green' community planning—rather than to do so reactively?"
- "Charlottesville is already suffering from effects such as urban heat islands and climate-induced poverty. Reducing emissions from public transit is one way Charlottesville MUST support its inhabitants."
- "This isn't just about the next set of buses. It's about the fuel infrastructure the jurisdiction invests in and will want to keep using for decades to come. Now is the time to invest in battery electric charging infrastructure, not fossil fuels like methane...Invest in the fuel infrastructure we can be most certain will be best for the climate now AND in the future while improving air quality along the bus routes."
- "Investing in any form of gas will bake in decades of fossil fuel burning, which does not align with the City's climate goals. Any cost savings will be paid for by our children, so they are not savings. They are just deferrals. Electric is the only way to go."
- "Environmental justice is a central part of the sustainability movement. Battery electric buses are a win-win solution for the underserved population in our city AND for the earth as a whole."
- "Bus infrastructure choices made today have rippling effects throughout the usable life of the vehicles. Sensible electrification measures should be made now, to allow residents of all socioeconomic classes to benefit from the climate and air quality benefits they provide."
- "As a CAT rider, I'm concerned for the health of riders like myself and my family, as well as drivers and community members who breathe the current emissions. I hope the City and County will take steps to invest in making our transit system healthier and better for the next generation."
- "UVA, a close community partner who manages a fleet of 40 buses, has done thorough research and has determined that battery electric buses are a superior choice over other alternative fuel buses. As a community member, I strongly agree with the choice of battery electric buses for sustainability, emissions, pollutants, and health."

- "We are running out of time to reach the global temperature goal of 1.5°C. Our world is burning right NOW. There is no time to wait, any action is one step closer to the change in structural behavior that we need to see from all levels of government. Do not stand idly by when your own future and your children's futures are at stake. Zero emissions energy sources are crucial to this fight. Thank you."
- "I moved to this city because of our shared love of nature. It breaks my heart that this beautiful city that holds nature in such high regard continues to make decisions antithetical to that fact. Please make this change!"
- "Electric buses are more cost-effective to maintain and more reliable than fossil-fuel buses. Fears about electric buses breaking down are a red-herring. The U.S. National Renewable Energy Laboratory has found that the fuel economy of BEBs is five times higher than that of diesel buses operated on equivalent routes...Further, CNG will lock in decades of fossil-fuel infrastructure for Charlottesville."
- "Zero emission vehicles represent a meaningful way to decarbonize the transportation sector of the economy. Battery powered buses also have the benefit (if they contain vehicle to grid technology) of being able to bolster the grid when they are not in service or in emergency outages-a win/win for the environment and grid reliability."
- "There is no reason that I can see why we should not have zero-emission buses in Charlottesville. We should purchase more of them such that we reduce the overall car burden in Charlottesville. We know that people of color are disproportionately affected by greenhouse gas emissions and by a lack of a public transit. We should purchase zero emission buses at higher numbers in order to solve both problems."
- "As a life-long resident of the Charlottesville/Albemarle area, I am excited that City Council has the opportunity to make Zero-Emission Buses (ZEBs) a reality in our town. I hope you take into consideration our point of view and do some research on how ZEBs can improve air quality, resident health, and town planning. Chattanooga, TN was faced with a similar decision a few decades ago and they decided to make the switch to ZEBs which helped them reduce traffic and reduce maintenance costs. I hope seeing the net benefits of ZEBs will be enough for the council to justify the initial costs. We all believe it will be worth it. Thank you."
- "I recently purchased a Chevy Bolt EV...Every gallon of gas burned forces our climate to get hotter, and after this summer anyone paying attention knows we are well into the danger zone. 'Natural gas' is a marketing stroke of genius. It is methane, which is many times worse than CO2 in (over)heating our climate. We are not 'on track' to avoid the worst effects of climate breakdown. We must collectively and individually do*everything* we can, now. The price we pay-in economic, physical and psychological damage-will only escalate sharply. Please do what only you can do. It's a tough call, but we're in a tough situation. Thank you."
- "This is so important for everyone in our community. Cleaner air, less noise, less carbon contributing to rising temperatures! A happier and healthier life for the people, our city trees, and wildlife. Won't it be nice to hear the birds sing, smell the flowers, and greet our neighbors as we walk, bicycle, and ride the bus? This is the kind of green city the City Council describes in its vision statement for 2025! Please make it happen!"
- "My 19-year-old PVCC student takes the bus almost every day. The PVCC buses alone take trips every hour, and their air effects can be smelled for minutes after the bus passes. I support electric buses!"
- "I fully support ZEBs for our community. Not only will they reduce our community's collective carbon footprint, but the reduction in localized emissions will have a very real impact on citizen respiratory health. Thank you for your commitment to our community."