

Visit may boost Proterra's sales



HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood talks to Proterra workers Thursday.

Electric bus maker lauded as model for green jobs

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U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood's visit to the Proterra factory in Greenville on Thursday may help the company sell 40 of its battery-powered transit buses in South America.

Jeff Granato, Proterra's chief executive, said his lead contact with the potential buyer was excited to hear the top U.S. transportation official would visit the plant.

"He said send me pictures immediately of you with the secretary and any articles" as he tries to

secure the necessary approvals for the sale, Granato told *The Greenville News*.

Granato said support from the government can be important validation for overseas customers, though it's not as key for U.S. sales.

LaHood, though, said his visit with Peter Rogoff, administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, would likely boost Proterra's profile with U.S. transit agencies that are potential buyers of its zero-emissions buses.

Asked if he might encourage the District of

BUS PLANT

See photos from Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood's Proterra visit at the link with this story at GreenvilleOnline.com

Columbia to buy Proterra buses, LaHood said he doesn't run DC's mass transit agency.

Then the former Republican congressman from Illinois said, "I guarantee you the story that's being told here today with our presence here will get out around America. I don't think I really have to say much more than that."

"My presence here, I think, is an endorsement of what's going on here. And almost every transit district in the country we have a relationship with. And when they see me standing in front of one of these clean buses with the administrator, that's a pretty good message. I don't know if I have to say much more than that."

The remarks drew applause from local business and political leaders who came to hear LaHood at Proterra's temporary factory in the former Orders Distributing

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BUS

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Co. warehouse along Interstate 85.

The company, launched from scratch six years ago in Colorado, hopes to break ground in April on a permanent plant at Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research, Granato said, though it's still working to secure financing for the \$33 million project.

Proterra plans to hire 1,300 workers eventually. So far, it employs about 130 people, including contract workers.

LaHood praised the company as an example of the "green" jobs the Obama administration has been talking about.

"This is the touchstone example of what President Obama talked about in his State of the Union Tuesday night," LaHood said.

LaHood runs the U.S. Department of Transportation, which includes the FTA, which funds the transit agencies that are Proterra's customers.

LaHood hailed Proterra's collaboration with Clemson, the FTA and private investors who contributed \$20 million to the company.

"This is a great company," he said.

"It represents everything that this administration believes in, in terms of green jobs, in terms of clean-burning buses, in terms of private investment (combined) with public dollars, in terms of collaboration with the university, in terms of collaboration with the community."

Former Republican Rep. Gresham Barrett, who attended the event, said he was glad to see LaHood be a "cheerleader" for Proterra.

"Having government focus on the private sector and say, 'This is the model. This is what we need to do,' I think is a good thing," said Barrett, who represented South Carolina's 3rd District until relinquishing the seat to run unsuccessfully for governor

TODAY IN HISTORY

In 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds after liftoff from Cape Canaveral, killing its seven crew members, including teacher Christa McAuliffe.

In 1547, England's King Henry VIII died; he was succeeded by his 9-year-old son, Edward VI.

In 1853, Cuban revolutionary Jose Marti was born in Havana.

In 1973, a cease-fire officially went into effect in the Vietnam War.

last year.

Proterra's undisclosed prospect in South America is just part of the business it's chasing overseas as it ramps up manufacturing in Greenville.

Granato said the company is negotiating with potential buyers in Paraguay, Brazil, France, Turkey and Canada and has talked to officials at the port of Charleston about exporting from Greenville. It's also eyeing more orders in the United States.

Thursday, Doran Barnes, executive director of Foothill Transit in Los Angeles County, Calif., said his board is thinking about buying another nine buses from Proterra using \$10.2 million from the FTA. Foothill, Proterra's first customer, is already operating three of the company's Ecoride BE35 models.

"We've had visitors from all throughout the country, from all throughout the world that have come to see the Proterra product in action. There's incredible interest," Barnes said at the ceremony in Greenville.

"And we're very excited about that. In fact at some point, I think we may actually have to open up a traveler and visitors bureau given all the folks that have been coming to visit us."

On a separate subject, LaHood said South Carolina was welcome to take part in the federal plan to bring high-speed rail service to 80 percent of the U.S. population over the next 25 years.

"The only advice I would give you is get your act together," LaHood said in response to a question from the audience. "Make a commitment to do it. Have a good plan."

LaHood said the nation is at the point now with high-speed rail that it was at with interstate development when President Eisenhower signed the interstate bill 50 years ago.

The federal government has committed \$11 billion for high-speed rail over the past two years and "we're just starting," he said.

"So if you all want to get on the train, we're ready to have you join us."

LOTTERIES

S.C. numbers

MIDDAY PICK 3 7-6-8
 MIDDAY PICK 4 3-3-7-6
 EVENING PICK 3 9-1-5
 EVENING PICK 4 3-7-4-2
 PALMETTO CASH 5

1-3-10-16-32 Multiplier: 3
 WED. POWERBALL

.....4-5-36-47-58
 Powerball: 6 Power Play: 3

Ga. numbers

MIDDAY CASH 3 8-5-7
 MIDDAY CASH 4 6-1-8-6
 EVENING CASH 3 6-0-4
 EVENING CASH 4 3-4-2-2
 FANTASY 5 16-26-30-35-37