

Memo to: Metro Ethics Committee: Board Chair Paul Smedberg, First Vice Chair Lucinda Babers, Second Vice Chair Jim Ports, and federal representative Sarah Kline
cc: Metro Board, Metro Office of Inspector General, Metro Chief Counsel Phillip Staub
From: Earthjustice, Northern Bus Barn Neighbors, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists
Re: Ethics Committee decision re: Metro board member Matt Letourneau's conflict of interest
Date: September 7, 2022

Our organizations are requesting that you, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (Metro) Ethics Committee, publicly release the results of your investigation of Virginia Metro board member Matthew Letourneau's conflict of interest.

On June 15, we asked you to determine if Letourneau's ties to the fossil fuel industry and his pronounced bias in favor of fossil fuel buses violated Metro's [Code of Ethics](#). If you found him to be in violation, he should recuse himself from all discussions and deliberations about the status of the Metrobus fleet.

You met on June 23 to consider our [complaint](#), but you have not released your findings, and there has been no indication that you plan to do so. The Ethics Committee owes it to the public to be as transparent as possible.

Letourneau, himself, would agree. After the Metro Ethics Committee declined to release the results of its investigation of then-board member Jack Evans' conflict of interest three years ago, it was Letourneau who formally requested that the findings be made public.

"The conduct that necessitated the ethics investigation raises concerns about the behavior of a board member, WMATA's procurement practices and WMATA's overall accountability," Letourneau wrote in a [letter](#) he [sent](#) to the committee in his capacity as the chairman of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission. "The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission requests that the Ethics Committee provide information about the basis for the investigation and make public the findings.

"... When serious allegations are made and an investigation conducted, the results must be disclosed to the greatest extent possible, and the public must be assured that appropriate action has been taken," Letourneau's [letter](#) continued. "The stakes are high, and WMATA is under great scrutiny. The failure to act transparently in this matter to date is not consistent with our expectations, nor those of our funding partners and the public."

The 15-page [memorandum](#) we gave to you in June pointed out that Letourneau is the managing director of communications and media for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's [Global Energy Institute](#), which represents the interests of the Chamber's oil and gas industry members. Our memo also revealed that he has received nearly [\\$20,000](#) in contributions from fossil fuel interests for his campaigns for Loudoun County Dulles District supervisor, a position he still holds. His funders include the owner of the largest oil company in Virginia, the CEO of the American Gas Association, and top officials from the American Petroleum Institute, the largest oil and gas industry trade association in the country.

Letourneau's employer, the Global Energy Institute, [falsely claims](#) that fossil "natural" gas—mainly comprised of methane, which is [significantly worse](#) for the climate than carbon dioxide—is a "solution" for global warming, and Letourneau has been the Metro board's most vocal supporter of the transit agency's ill-conceived plan to increase the percentage of fossil gas buses in its fleet, install new gas fueling infrastructure at its Shepherd Parkway bus garage in Southwest, D.C., and expand the gas fueling facility at its Bladensburg garage. As documented by our [memo](#), Letourneau routinely makes misleading statements that grossly exaggerate the benefits of fossil gas buses—which are no better than diesel buses—and understate the feasibility of electrifying Metro's bus fleet more quickly. Metro's transition plan lags behind that of larger transit agencies as well as smaller bus fleets in our region.

Letourneau is one of only two current board members who were involved in the deliberations over the [Metrobus Fleet Plan](#) the board endorsed in June 2021. The Metro Electric Bus Coalition provided the current board with a [detailed analysis](#) showing that the plan was riddled with inaccuracies and outmoded data, indicating that the previous board did not have the information it needed to make an informed decision about the future of the fleet.

The comments Mr. Letourneau made three years ago about the Evans ethics investigation apply here as well. As he correctly pointed out back then: "The conduct that necessitated the ethics investigation raises concerns about the behavior of a board member, WMATA's procurement practices and WMATA's overall accountability." Metro's current bus procurement plan would increase the agency's dependence on a highly polluting technology for decades when it should replace its fossil fuel buses with electric buses as fast as possible—exactly what other transit agencies are doing.

Metro plans to transition its 1,600 buses to a zero-emission fleet by 2045. By contrast, Los Angeles' 2,320 buses and Houston's 1,236 buses are scheduled to be all-electric by 2030, when more than 80 percent of Metro's buses will still be running on fossil fuels. King County (Seattle) plans to electrify its 1,600-bus fleet by 2035, while fleets in Chicago (1,864 buses) and New York City (5,920 buses) are scheduled to be electrified by 2040. Locally, the D.C. Circulator bus fleet will be all-electric by 2029, while Montgomery County's Ride On buses, Alexandria's DASH buses and Fairfax County's buses will all be fully electric by 2035.

In February, the Washington, D.C., Council unanimously adopted a [resolution](#) calling on Metro to buy only electric buses going forward and transition to at least a 50-percent electric bus fleet by 2030. Last year, four dozen elected officials, including four U.S. House members and more than 30 Maryland state legislators, also [urged](#) Metro to replace half its fleet with electric buses by the end of the decade. If Metro bought only electric buses during its next five-year procurement schedule, which runs from fiscal year 2024 through FY 2028, it could come close. Based on Metro's practice of buying 100 new buses a year, 45 percent of its fleet would be electric by 2030, enabling Metro to fully electrify its fleet by no later than 2040.

We are not calling into question Letourneau's ability to continue serving on the Metro board. However, in light of his direct ties to the oil and gas industry, it is imperative that he recuse himself from participating in any discussions, deliberations and decisions regarding the future of the Metro bus fleet.