

McMillan, Acquanette (Netta)

From: Victor Caballero <
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2026 10:25 AM
To: PublicComment-AutoResponse
Cc: Hampton, Tyron
Subject: Agenda Item 7 May 18, 2026

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May 18, 2026

Mayor Victor M. Gordo and Pasadena City Council Members
Pasadena City Hall
100 N. Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

SUBJECT: Opposition to the Pasadena Hydrogen Bus Procurement and Infrastructure Investment

Dear Mayor Gordo and City Council Members,

I am writing as a Pasadena resident and property owner to strongly urge the City Council to halt its current trajectory regarding the procurement of hydrogen fuel cell electric buses (FCEBs) and the associated fueling infrastructure. The proposed \$150.7 million project, including the \$32 million authorization for 17 hydrogen buses and the looming construction of the Transit Operations and Maintenance Facility and fueling station, represents a massive and ill-advised gamble with public funds. Hydrogen for public transportation makes neither economic nor environmental sense, and continuing down this path threatens to drain city resources and lock us into an inefficient technology for decades.

I recognize that the Department of Transportation (DOT) has secured significant grant funding for this transition. However, allowing the fear of losing grants to drive long-term infrastructure decisions is a sunk-cost fallacy. A bad investment is a bad investment, even if heavily subsidized initially.

1. The Illusion of "Green" Hydrogen and Environmental Claims The DOT's promises of "green" hydrogen integration are highly speculative. The current reality is that the vast majority of commercially available hydrogen is "gray" hydrogen, derived from natural gas. Investing heavily in hydrogen infrastructure right now is essentially an investment in fossil fuels, contradicting our city's climate goals. The recent collapse of major regional green hydrogen projects, like the stalled ARCHES hub, underscores how uncertain the future supply of affordable, truly green hydrogen is. We cannot base a \$150 million municipal project on hope. Furthermore, producing, transporting, and storing hydrogen is inherently inefficient compared to direct electrification. A battery-electric bus converts electricity to motion at 70-80% efficiency; a hydrogen fuel cell wastes significant amounts of that energy, with round-trip efficiency closer to 30-45%.

2. Facilities, Costs, and City Resources The financial burden of this project extends far beyond the initial bus purchase. We are looking at a \$150.7 million total project cost, requiring massive new facilities like the Transit Operations and Maintenance Facility and a highly complex hydrogen fueling station (currently the subject of a \$316,800 contract with Stantec). These are not one-time costs; they represent a long-term commitment to a volatile and expensive fuel source. If the promised cheap, green hydrogen fails to materialize, the city—and by extension, the taxpayers—will be left subsidizing an exorbitant operational budget. This will inevitably drain resources that could be far better spent on other pressing municipal needs, infrastructure repair, and public utility management.

3. Safety Risks to Residents

The proposed hydrogen fueling station, to be located at 159 S.

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inneloa Avenue, introduces a highly flammable and pressurized gas into our city limits. The logistics of transporting large quantities of hydrogen through residential and commercial areas, and storing it locally, present safety concerns that have not been adequately addressed.

4. Flawed DOT Promises Regarding Battery-Electric Viability The DOT's primary defense of hydrogen hinges on the assertion that battery-electric buses (BEBs) lack the range for Pasadena's longer routes, claiming a need for a 2:1 replacement ratio compared to hydrogen's 1:1. However, this conclusion appears to be based on limited data from a single battery-electric bus procured under older specifications, and fails to account for the rapid, ongoing advancements in battery technology. Other Southern California transit agencies—including LA Metro, Long Beach Transit, and Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus—have successfully implemented robust battery-electric fleets. Are we to believe Pasadena's transit needs are so uniquely demanding that we must pursue a complex, experimental, and less efficient alternative?

The DOT has stated that shifting to BEBs now would cost an additional \$45 million and jeopardize \$38 million in grants. But we must weigh that against the long-term operational and environmental costs of sticking with hydrogen. The DOT itself has acknowledged that a full plan update emphasizing BEB technology is scheduled for 2027. Why are we rushing to lock in 17 hydrogen buses and multi-million dollar fueling infrastructure before this comprehensive update?

Call to Action:

strongly urge the City Council to:

Halt the procurement of the 17 hydrogen FCEBs and any further contracts related to the hydrogen fueling station (including the Stantec contract).

Demand a transparent, ten-year lifecycle cost and emissions analysis comparing the current hydrogen strategy against a modernized battery-electric strategy, utilizing the latest 2026/2027 battery capability projections, not outdated benchmarks.

Re-evaluate the true environmental cost of the hydrogen supply chain we will be relying on.

Pasadena prides itself on forward-thinking, community-centered governance. Let us not become a cautionary tale of misallocated resources and premature technological lock-in.

Thank you for your time and service to our city.

Sincerely,

Victor Caballero