Electric bus program recognized by White House

BY LADONNA BEEKER
THE JOURNAL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Seneca's bus partner received a prestigious award from a White House program Tuesday for its "innovation and creativity."

Greenville electric bus manufacturer Proterra was one of 14 individuals and companies to receive the Champions of Change award for transportation innovation Tuesday at the White House.

Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood welcomed the "innovators" and people who he said "think outside of the box" when it comes to transportation initiatives. "I used to say this is not your father and grandfather's Department of Transportation," LaHood said Tuesday. "I knew this was going to be a transformational president, a transformational administration and a transformational Department of Transportation. And frankly, that's what we are honoring here today."

The Journal watched a live feed of the ceremony Tuesday via www.whitehouse.gov/live.

Proterra chief executive officer David Bennett was a part of a panel to discuss the importance of transforming transportation for each community.

In addition to Bennett, Proterra's chief business development officer Marc Gottschalk, founder Dale Hill and vice president of sales and marketing Ian Shackleton accepted the Champions of Change award Tuesday.



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Proterra CEO David Bennett, second from right, explains to the panel and audience how the company took a risk to create its electric buses. But, he said, it was with a passionate staff that the buses came to operation.

Also, several Proterra customers, including Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick, attended the White House ceremony as guests.

Proterra was honored for its leading in environmentally friendly transportation initiatives, which details its electric buses. Seneca will become the first city in the nation to have an all-electric bus system starting no later than early 2013.

"We took a step forward and took a risk," Bennett said. "Part of what is exciting about innovation is finding people who are willing to take a risk. They are willing to put their heart and soul into it. ... We put together a group of people who have passion around transportation with innovative technology. You need that energy going forward to change the industry."

Proterra's electric buses operate on batteries that charge in less than 10 minutes with zero emissions. Currently, the company has electric buses in Austin, Texas; Burbank, Calif.; Columbia; Fort Lewis, Wash.; Pomona, Calif.; San Antonio, Texas; Tallahassee, Fla.; Stockton, Calif.; and Reno, Nev.

"You are the innovators. You are the creators. You are the ones who have transformed America's transportation system," LaHood said to the award recipients. "We all feel very privileged at the Department of Transportation to have the opportunity to facilitate that with a little bit of money and a little bit of creativity."

Award recipients and their guests received a tour of the East Wing of the White House. Proterra's group was also expected to have a photo opportunity with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.).

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Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood addresses the audience at a Champions of Change award ceremony Tuesday at the White House. LaHood said the award recipients are innovators and creative in upgrading America's means for transportation.

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE PROGRAM

The Champions of Change program was created as part of President Obama's Winning the Future initiative. Each week, a different sector is highlighted and groups of Champions are recognized for the work they are doing to serve and strengthen their communities.

Source: The White House Communications Office