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Unveiled: First American-Made Streetcar In 60 Years

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Let it not be said that we don't make anything in this country anymore. As of today, we've made a streetcar.

The vehicle in question was unveiled in a ceremony on streets of Portland, Oregon, where it will go into service with a fleet of Czech-made brethren. The city's much-admired streetcar network recently got \$75 million in stimulus funds for an expansion. On hand for the festivities today were DOT chief Ray LaHood and transportation savvy Oregon congressmen Peter DeFazio and Earl Blumenauer. (The latter

dignitary, whose sartorial trademark is a bow tie, today donned a straight tie to “mess” with Sec. LaHood.)

Local company Oregon Iron Works made the machine at a nearby factory that employs hundreds of skilled laborers. The company has a pending order from Portland for a half dozen streetcars and one worth \$26 million from the city of Tuscon for seven more. OIW aims to get at least 60 percent of its parts from other US companies and to help seed an urban transit industry in Oregon.

Since about 1950, building modern streetcars has been a lost art in this country. OIW decided, based on the success of Portland’s streetcar line, to try to rediscover it and claims that their product is already of a higher quality than European competitors.



Sec. LaHood, Rep. Blumenauer

If our Spidey sense is right—as, well, it usually is—this company and Oregon have seized an incredibly valuable first-mover advantage in what could prove to be an important domestic industry in years to come. After American cities tore up streetcar tracks and junked their rolling stock en masse in the middle of last century, dozens of are now planning or considering a new system. With oil at \$70 a barrel in the depths of brutal global recession, our guess is that number will only grow in the years ahead.

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