

United Streetcar on track with made-in-USA production

By Ilie Mitaru, associate writer, *Oregon Business*

United Streetcar was spun off of the 67-year-old Oregon Iron Works in 2004, with the goal of supplying American-made street cars to the nation, and abroad.

The impetus for the project came in 2005, when Congress approved a spending bill which included \$4 million to Trimet for an American-made street car for the city of Portland. Oregon Iron Works created United Streetcar after winning the contract to manufacture the streetcar.

The company held a press conference Monday afternoon for reaching their American-made aspirations.

Well, almost. “We’re about 70% there” said United Streetcar President **Chandra Brown**, the Iron Works employee who led the spin-off effort and gathered support from elected officials. The company is currently in the process of replacing the remaining foreign parts from its design, and will be producing 90%-American-made by the end of the year, says Brown.



At this point, no one is sweating the details. It was a congratulatory mood as Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood (pictured at left in the foreground, examining a streetcar component) and Congressmen Peter DeFazio, Earl Blumenauer and Kurt Schrader toured the \$4 million fabrication bay and test track at an industrial center in Clackamas.

“Of the \$4 million spent on the testing plant,” Brown says, “we think it’s going to be recapped by the potentially hundreds of street cars we’ll build.” Brown says the company has \$50 million in orders, with six cars slated for Portland and seven for Tucson, Arizona.

Since closing those deals United Streetcar has completed a new 43,000-square-foot streetcar assembly bay, a 3,100-square-foot streetcar track for on-site testing and a 6,400-square-foot environmental, functional and water testing bay.

In preparation for yesterday's event, United Streetcar installed a podium in front of a new streetcar scrolled with the words "Made In America."

Brown opened by stressing the importance of state and federal funds for the project,

"We would not be here today without the help of the federal government." She said the project proved that "it is absolutely possible to do a successful private/public partnership."

Schrader, Defazio and Blumenauer each spoke briefly, congratulating the company and each other's work on public transit.

"We in Oregon know that manufacturing jobs are the backbone to our economy," said Schrader, "we want to export cars and services—not jobs—to the rest of the world."

Transportation Secretary LaHood praised the "exceptional leadership" of Oregon's representatives in advocating for public transit. "Streetcars have caught on in America," he said "and now they will be built here in America."

With the federal budget still unreconciled and varying versions of a future transportation bill floating through congress, how much federal assistance companies like Union Streetcar will receive remains unclear.

For now at least, the company can claim to be the first U.S.-based streetcar manufacturer in almost 60 years, and with orders filing in, the delegation was nothing if not optimistic.

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