

MetroLINK projects powered with solar energy



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Two building projects by Bush Construction for MetroLINK not only are rising out of the ground but are reaching to the sun for their energy.

The Davenport-based Bush Construction and the Rock Island County transit agency are partnering to bring solar power to MetroLINK's transit maintenance facility and a bus transfer station, both in Rock Island. When completed, both structures will boast solar modules — also known as solar panels — on their roofs to capture sunlight and turn it into electricity.

Jennifer Garrity, MetroLINK's administration manager, said solar energy was one of several sustainable technologies researched when planning for the \$34 million facility began more than five years ago. "We've been committed to green technology since the introduction of compressed-natural gas buses in 2000," she said. "As a community partner, using sustainable energies creates value back to the community, the transit operation and the environment."

More than a decade after MetroLINK's first compressed-natural gas buses went on the road in 2002, about 85 percent of its fleet today are compressed-natural gas. Metrolink also is procuring two electric hybrid buses next year.

The photovoltaic solar panel array, which converts sunlights into direct current electricity, is expected to produce about 80 percent of the electricity demand for the bus maintenance building, Garrity said.

"Installation of the solar modules on the transit maintenance facility began in August and that system should be fully installed sometime in October," said Tom Quinn, Bush Construction's project manager.

Bush is the prime contractor on both the maintenance facility project located at 4501 4th Ave. and a \$2 million downtown transfer station being built at 1975 2nd Ave. The contractor is working with Bosch Solar Energy, the manufacturer of the solar modules, and Michigan-based J. Ranck Electric Inc. on the installation process.

Solar energy is one of many green technologies being built into the 140,000-square-foot maintenance facility. The project is striving to become Silver-certified in Leadership in Energy and Environment Design, or LEED, under the U.S. Green Building Council guidelines, she added.

The cost of the solar panel system is \$1.38 million. "Half of that cost is paid through an Illinois

Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant, which was awarded to us through a competitive process. It was good to be recognized by Illinois Clean Energy for our forward thinking."

The project includes the installation of 1,344 255-watt modules at the maintenance facility. Although a much smaller footprint, the transfer station also will generate its own electricity through a small photovoltaic system on its roof. Garrity added that an additional solar system is being installed to produce hot water in the larger structure.

Bush Construction's \$21.7 million contract for the maintenance facility covers everything in the construction process except the building concrete, the structural steel, the photovoltaic solar array system and the compressed natural gas system. Des Moines-based Weitz Co. is the construction manager. It is expected to be completed in early 2014.

The transfer station should be completed in November and is being built as part of The Locks transit-oriented housing and commercial development. The modern structure will replace an on-street facility nearby at 16th Street and 3rd Avenue.