

Chinese Electric Bus Maker Plans ID Factory

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A Chinese maker of electric buses said it hopes to move its U.S. office to Boise this year and could eventually manufacture some of its vehicles in southwestern Idaho.

Zonda USA, the small liaison of Zhongda Industrial Group in the United States, isn't saying just where or when a manufacturing plant would be built or how many jobs such a move would create.

As a result, the Idaho Statesman (<http://bit.ly/t5tbCR>) reports that local economic development leaders are remaining optimistically cautious. Clark Krause, director of the Boise Valley Economic Partnership, warns that nothing is imminent.

"These things take quite a bit of time," he said.

The newspaper reports Zhongda can manufacture about 15,000 buses annually at its Chinese facilities. Founded in 1994, the group has more than 6,900 employees in China.

Zhongda decided on Idaho because it has a business-friendly attitude and is only a few hundred miles from Pacific Ocean shipping ports, said Ken St. John, the company's spokesman. The state is also "right-to-work," meaning that union leverage here is limited and companies can pay employees less money.

St. John said the company envisions Idaho operations to mirror the relationship that German and Japanese car manufacturers have with their U.S. production plants.

Though the project is in its infancy, that doesn't stop local elected officials from getting excited.

"They're the real deal," said Nampa Mayor Tom Dale. "They're a prominent company in China, and the technology with these electric buses seems to be leading edge."

Zhongda has already tried to lure a little local business, so far unsuccessfully.

In its visit earlier this year, its representatives met with Valley Regional Transit officials to pitch its electric buses. But the southwestern Idaho public transit operator had just completed updating its fleet of buses that run on compressed natural gas, said Mark Carnopis, a spokesman for the transit system.

"We don't have any commitment to them," he said.

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