

"Obviously, we have concerns," Gaydos said. "If 164 employees say they have lost confidence in [Hamm], that has to be a concern. If the findings that Dennis Westlund has produced are an accurate assessment of how the organization feels, we have concerns. We are deeply troubled by the issues that have been raised."

A line of inspirational quotes adorn the dry-erase board in Ken Hamm's office. "Successful leaders can't be consumed with getting the credit." "Leadership inevitably involves sacrifice."

Hamm, 57, says that he is aware of the

criticisms against him, and he doesn't take them personally. "I haven't been offended by anything," he said. "I've looked at it as constructive criticism and tried to work with the board and the leadership team and the other employees to see how we can improve ourselves."

He said that he aims to balance operating and capital expenses while seeking long-range solutions for increasing traffic congestion. While acknowledging that the capital projects may hurt employee morale, he said that the district's primary responsibility is to the local business owners who provide most of LTD's revenue through the payroll tax. "The business community says, 'We want you to behave more like a business, and we want you to invest as much as possible in

services that benefit our businesses,'" he said.

But Hamm can't make LTD's financial decisions on his own. Other senior managers help him draft the budget, and the board approves it. Gaydos said that board members have encouraged LTD's big-ticket capital projects, and they are as culpable as Hamm for any problems that have arisen from the budget.

"I think that Ken Hamm is certainly responsible for part of it, but we're certainly responsible, and all senior management is responsible," Gaydos said. "To focus just on Ken Hamm is not fair."

Now, district managers are striking a conciliatory note with employees and riders. They are planning service "fixes" for the

most problematic bus routes, though Hamm says he can't promise that the district will restore lost service hours. Managers are meeting regularly with union representatives, board members and drivers. The board just approved a five-year human resources plan to create a more "welcoming" workplace environment.

Hamm, for his part, scheduled six "listening sessions" with employees. The poster announcing the sessions featured Hamm grinning, eyes wide, with enormous ears. "Employees are invited to drop in and 'bend the GM's ear,'" it read.

Hamm said that the poster was intended to add some levity to the discussions. "If I can't laugh at myself, who can?"

Gaydos says that the board may interpret the negative feedback about Hamm in one of several ways. They may decide that the complaints are due to external factors beyond Hamm's control, like the district's economic challenges and residual ill will from the strike. They may determine that Hamm is partly responsible for the district's troubles but allow him a chance to make changes. Or they may conclude that LTD has lost so much trust and accountability under Hamm that leadership simply must change.

"There's a variety of approaches, and that's not an exhaustive list," Gaydos said. "I have faith that [Hamm] has the capacity to lead LTD, but there has to be significant changes. Collectively, the board will have to look at the information and come to a conclusion."

EW

LTD's IRAQ

A chief complaint from the unionized employees is that Hamm focuses on capital projects at the expense of LTD's day-to-day operations. Their primary example is EmX, a project to install bus rapid transit corridors throughout the metropolitan area.

EmX was initiated by LTD's former general manager, Phyllis Loobey, and Hamm inherited the project when he was hired in 2000. The vision: Articulated hybrid-electric buses zip down bus-only "corridors" from downtown Eugene to downtown Springfield via Franklin Boulevard. Over the next 20-25 years, the district will add more corridors; one will run down Pioneer Parkway to Gateway Mall and the planned Riverbend Hospital. The Franklin line, which will be ready for public use in December 2006, will cost about \$23 million, including four buses at \$1 million each.

During Hamm's tenure, the budget for EmX has ballooned from \$1.2 million in 2001 to \$20 million in 2005. Most of the funding is from federal sources, but LTD provides a minimum 20 percent local match. While shuffling money toward EmX, the district has scaled back busy service routes such as 11 (Bertelson) and 30 (Thurston).

"EmX is LTD's Iraq," Dreier said. "It's a mess that we can't get out of now."

— Kera Abraham

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