

New Flyer Back in Gear after Slump in MTA Bus Production

(November 12) Following a month in which New Flyer delivered only two of the 47 new CNG buses it was scheduled to send the MTA, the Minnesota company is taking steps to recover from a slump in production.

"One of New Flyer's problems was getting parts from suppliers," said John Drayton, director of MTA's Vehicle Acquisition and Technical Support department. "The other issue was personnel. They were understaffed."

However, he said, the company now has shifted more than 100 workers to the production line and has been working seven days a week to complete the MTA's order of 223 buses. As a result, Drayton expects to see New Flyer catch up on production backlogs. The company will incur substantial financial penalties beginning Jan. 1, 2000, for every bus not delivered.

On Friday, North American Bus Industries delivered its "first article" bus to the MTA for 30 days of local testing. The bus then will be returned to NABI to serve as a "reference" for the remaining 214 buses in the current order. The first NABI buses are scheduled to arrive in Los Angeles in late January.

Meanwhile, Detroit Diesel continues to convert a steady 20-plus buses a month from ethanol/methanol to diesel power. Some 255 of the 333 buses have been converted. With the conversion to diesel, the buses are now achieving close to 2,000 miles between service delays.

"Running the ethanol/methanol buses had a devastating impact on the MTA's fleet reliability," said Drayton. "Before we began converting these buses, they only represented about 15 percent of our active fleet, but they required 25 to 30 percent of our maintenance resources to keep them running.

"The conversions have turned these buses into our most reliable performers," he added. Only three of the original 333 ethanol/methanol buses are still operational.

The MTA also is retrofitting the converted diesel buses with new, more reliable wheelchair lifts, and this should further improve fleet reliability, Drayton said.

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