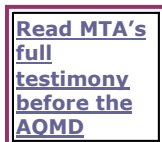


MTA Testimony

Tough AQMD Rule Forcing Clean-Air Buses Could Hinder Efforts to Reduce Air Pollution

(Jan. 19) Requiring all fleets of public vehicles to convert to alternative fuels could actually hinder the MTA and other transit agencies in their efforts to reduce air pollution, the MTA told the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) in testimony Jan. 12.



At its April meeting, the AQMD will consider a requirement that would force transit agencies to buy only clean-air vehicles as soon as the new regulation is adopted. All new buses, trucks and cars in government-owned fleets would have to be equal to or lower in emissions than methanol vehicles.

62,000 vehicles affected

Some 62,000 vehicles - including transit buses and school buses, garbage trucks and airport shuttle buses - would be affected by the rule in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

The AQMD has "put the cart before the horse" by considering restrictive clean air regulations even before adopting a master plan, the MTA's Transit Operations chief Tom Conner testified. While commending the AQMD for its efforts to reduce regional air pollution, he said the agency should be more flexible in its approach.

A mandate for alternative fuels, for example, could hamper development of the Metro Rapid Bus program by prohibiting the use of diesel articulated buses, even though such buses could carry almost twice as many passengers as a CNG bus. No bus manufacturer currently makes a CNG articulated bus.

Could eliminate hybrids

Such a rule also could eliminate development of low-emission hybrid buses because they are powered by diesel-electric motors.

Making transit agencies totally dependent on compressed or liquid natural gas buses could cripple public transportation if an earthquake or other disaster interrupted supplies, Conner said. He pointed to the Northridge earthquake that disrupted service to some 70,000 gas company customers for up to two weeks.

The MTA's diesel fleet is not nearly as susceptible to such disruptions, Conner said, because Metro Bus divisions have a 21-day supply of fuel that can be dispensed by pumps powered by small generators.

Industry needs time

Conner said the transportation industry needs time to develop a range of clean air solutions and that transit agencies need time to buy them and build or modify fueling facilities for them.

During his testimony, Conner noted that transit buses emit only 0.45 percent of smog-forming emissions in the region. The MTA's current

fleet of 790 CNG buses produces 252 fewer tons of NOx emissions annually than diesel buses. Within a year, the CNG fleet will grow to 1,355 buses and will emit 434 fewer tons of NOx pollutants.

The AQMD will conduct a public hearing on its proposed rule, Feb. 16. The MTA is expected to testify again at that hearing. Meanwhile, the Air Resources Board (ARB) is expected to discuss proposed regulations to reduce emissions statewide at its meeting, Jan. 27.

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