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Metro Gets Grant to Purchase More Clean-Air Buses

By KIM UPTON

(April 26, 2006) Due to the overwhelming success of its clean-air bus program, Metro has been awarded \$405,000 in grant funds from the Air Quality Management District (AQMD) to help pay for 75 clean-fuel, compressed natural gas (CNG) buses.

With this purchase, the Metro fleet is now 88 percent CNG buses, keeping it in the lead as the largest CNG fleet in North America. By 2008, the agency plans to have nearly 100 percent of the fleet running on CNG.

Metro's move to CNG buses is essential to Los Angeles air quality. Compressed natural gas buses are cleaner burning than comparable diesel vehicles, particularly in areas of nitrogen oxide (NOx) and particulate matter (PM) emissions, the two primary elements in what is commonly thought of as smog.

Compared with diesel-powered buses, the agency's CNG bus fleet reduces emissions of particulate matter by more than 90 percent, carbon monoxide by more than 80 percent and greenhouse gases by more than 20 percent.

Purchase of the newly funded buses brings the fleet of 2,500 vehicles directly operated by Metro up to nearly 2,200 vehicles running on compressed natural gas.

Buses now in operation

The 75, 40-foot buses were purchased last year and are already in operation. Total cost of the buses, which are funded with federal, state and local funds, is an estimated \$30 million.

While maintenance costs are typically 15 to 20 percent higher for CNG than for diesel buses, due to higher parts costs and increased maintenance requirements, Metro expects this price differential to decrease as diesel engines and exhaust systems require reconfiguration to meet increasingly stringent California Air Resources Board emission reduction rules.

Metro was the first transit agency to commit to compressed natural gas buses on a massive scale. Metro's CNG program was launched in 1993 with the purchase of about 200 buses.

Since then, Metro estimates it has reduced approximately 7,400 tons of nitrogen oxide and 60 tons of particulate matter. That is equivalent to removing more than 100,000 cars from the road each year for NOx and 30,000 cars for PM.

