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Photos courtesy of Mike Bottone

Metro's six new 42-foot hybrid buses have been running regular service at the Venice, West Valley, North Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley divisions since January.

Hybrid bus testing now under way at four divisions

- New technology makes buses more quiet, fuel efficient

By LAURA KLOTH
Staff Writer

(May 7, 2009) Metro's greening efforts continue. This time in the form of six hybrid buses now being tested at four bus divisions.

The buses were acquired for about $3.8 million, and since January, have been servicing patrons at the Venice, West Valley, North Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley divisions.

According to Mike Bottone, Director of Equipment Engineering, the buses operate on ultra capacitors instead of batteries. An ultra capacitor is a high-powered, energy dense electronic unit that provides power during acceleration, and then quickly recharges itself during normal braking. In between the acceleration cycles and braking, the engine is turning a generator that supplies the required power to the system.

Metro put the hybrid bus on display at L.A.County's 'Spotlight' Conversation held at Metro on Earth Day.

The ultra capacitors are situated at the roof of the bus, keeping the bus design similar to other Metro buses.

“When we do these type of things, we try to keep the buses as normal as possible,” Bottone said.

Reduces emissions and saves fuel

The $630,000 bus uses a Ford Triton V-10 gasoline engine, which is similar to the engine used in several Ford models. The 42-foot long vehicle is two feet longer than the standard bus, with room for two extra passengers.

Not only will the hybrid technology help reduce emissions, it will also save fuel, he said.

The typical diesel bus runs for 3.1 miles per gallon while early results show that a hybrid can run as much as 3.75 to 4.0 miles per gallon depending on the use.

The beauty of the technology is that it allows the bus to accelerate up to 50 miles an hour on hybrid energy - more than is needed for the stop-and-go driving on many routes, said Bottone.

The ride is quieter and because it reduces emissions, it is likely to help Metro comply with California Air Resources Board (CARB) requirements set for 2012, he added.

Division 15 Transportation Manager Gary Spivack said, so far, the buses are getting mixed reviews from the operators.

About 200 operators have been trained along with a select group of technicians, who are keeping everyone else up to speed.

“It’s a nice bus and has a lot of pickup and great power. But it has some quirks in terms of how you have to control it. You have to be aware of certain things,” said Spivack. “Will we buy more? I don’t know.”

Customers love the look and feel

Div. 15 Bus Operator Oscar Valdes has been driving one of the new buses on Line 234 to Sherman Oaks and says he’s been extremely pleased with it.

“I hope they keep this bus forever,” Valdes said, noting that it’s “tremendously better” to operate compared to other buses he’s driven

since he joined Metro in 1989.

It took a few hours of training to get use to the operation, Valdes said. “I noticed in the beginning, yeah, the bus has a lot of power. Once you keep control over the bus, it’s OK,” Valdes said.

Passengers have commented on the attractive appearance and reduced noise. “They’re so happy. They feel like a kid with a new toy,” Valdes said.

Once the testing is complete at the end of the year, some of the questions the board may have will deal with efficiency vs. the cost.

Although the hybrids are more fuel efficient, hybrid buses cost about $150,000 more than the CNG buses.
