ATTB Vision Survives with MTA's Hopes Pinned on Fuel Cell Power

By BILL HEARD, Editor
(April 19) The ATTB still lives! In fact, a prototype of the Advanced Technology Transit Bus with a fuel cell power plant could be in operation within 24 months.

If that plan is successful, it will involve one of the six ATTB prototypes developed for the MTA by Northrop-Grumman to be a reliable, light-weight, environmentally friendly and passenger-accessible vehicle.

Features seen on new buses

Thus far, no manufacturer has chosen to build ATTBs for the transit bus market, although its light-weight composite body and low-floor features are often seen on newer model buses.

In August, 1999, the MTA Board voted to hand over responsibility for the ATTB to the Fuel Cell Buyers Consortium, a group of public sector agencies - headed by the MTA - that are interested in the development of cost-efficient, zero-emission fuel cell power plants.

The Consortium took two major actions at its April meeting. The first was to issue a request for information from companies interested in developing and manufacturing what the group now calls an Advanced Transit Vehicle. The ATV would have features and performance characteristics comparable to the ATTB, but would be adaptable for use on Bus Rapid Transit corridors.

The group's second action was to approve a fuel cell work program that includes integration of a fuel cell power plant into one of the existing ATTB prototypes. The Consortium wants to develop a workable fuel cell that can be used in second- or third-generation versions of the ATV.

Can industry build it?

"Our objective is to demonstrate to industry that low-floor, light-weight, clean-emission vehicles are possible," says Eck Chaiboonma, an MTA transportation planning manager who coordinates the project. "We want to know whether they can build an ATV and what they have to do to make it feasible to build it."

The Consortium hopes to find a manufacturer that would build 500 ATVs for an initial order. It is asking industry to provide information about development of 40-foot, 60-foot articulated and 85-foot double-articulated vehicles.

A January 20 Consortium report noted that the strength of the ATTB is its light-weight, low-floor features "bundled together" with electric propulsion. But, it said much of the ATTB's technology is more than five years old. The challenge "is to utilize elements of the ATTB that are still viable and upgrade or replace deficient systems, while working in concert with market forces," the report said.

"Our plan is to procure and install a fuel cell on the vehicle within two years and to test it for two more years," says Chaiboonma. "But it may

be four years or more before we see a production model bus based on ATTB specifications and technology."

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