

Air Resources Board Adopts Clean-Air Rules for Transit Buses

(Feb. 25) The California Air Resources Board (CARB) adopted clean-air regulations, Thursday, that by 2007 will require the MTA and other transit agencies to operate only buses that are powered by alternative fuel engines or clean diesel engines.

CARB's regulations would permit agencies to follow one of two "paths" in buying new buses - an alternative fuels path and a diesel fuel path. The two paths were proposed to avoid forcing all transit agencies to immediately begin buying only alternative fuels buses.

CARB worked with agencies

"This rule is flexible," Douglas Kim, MTA transportation planning manager, told the LA Times. "The air board went to great lengths to work with the transit districts."

The alternate fuel path would require 85 percent of new buses purchased to be powered by alternative fuel engines. It would allow an agency until 2007 to meet more stringent clean-air standards.

The diesel path would allow agencies to buy new diesel buses until 2004, when they would have to start buying buses that are 87 percent cleaner. In 2007, these agencies would have to buy buses that are 95 percent cleaner.

Little or no impact on MTA

Some of CARB's proposals, such as reductions in NOx emissions and a requirement to use low-sulfur fuels, would have little or no impact on the MTA with its growing CNG fleet. But the MTA Board, at its January meeting ordered a report on the fiscal impact the regulations would have on the MTA.

CARB's proposed regulations, as currently written, are less stringent than those being considered by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD).

If adopted at its April 21 meeting, the AQMD rule would require transit agencies with 15 or more buses immediately to buy only clean-fuel vehicles. Fleets of 100 or more vehicles - including the MTA's non-revenue fleet - would have to meet that rule by Jan. 1, 2001.

Vulnerable to emergencies

These rules, according to an MTA staff report, would mean a \$54.7 million capital expenditure for the MTA and an increase of \$7.8 million in annual operating costs. The rules also could leave the agency vulnerable in the event of a major earthquake that disrupted CNG fueling.

And, according to MTA testimony at a Jan. 12 AQMD hearing, 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.

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