

# Metro to expand air-friendly bus fleet

## Pollution concern spurs addition of 250 compressed natural gas buses

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In an effort to reduce the region's air pollution, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority on Thursday approved the purchase of 250 compressed natural gas buses over the next two fiscal years, bringing its fleet of CNG buses to 414.

Although CNG buses cost about \$40,000 more than clean diesel buses, their biggest draw is that they emit less pollution into the air.

Officials say natural gas buses produce less nitrous oxides and other compounds associated with an increased incidence of lung cancer in adults and asthma in children than do diesel-powered vehicles.

The Washington, D.C., area is not in compliance with the federal Clean Air Act and must cut about 3½ tons of nitrous oxide emissions a day, officials said.

"The bottom line here is that our region currently has an air quality problem in that we are projected to exceed EPA emissions guidelines for nitrous oxide in 2005," said Christopher Zimmerman, Metro Board chairman. "Increased emissions [also] presents a public health risk."

The cost of the buses, along with the \$22 million price tag to upgrade the Four Mile Run Bus Facility along South Glebe Road in Arlington County, is expected to exceed Metro's two-year, \$94.5 million bus procurement budget. Because of this, board members asked staff to develop a funding and financing plan to cover the additional costs, estimated at another \$32 million.

Dana Kauffman, the only Metro Board member to vote against the measure, said he was concerned about the high costs involved. The money it costs to upgrade the bus facility for CNG buses, \$22 million, he said, could be used to pay for almost twice as many clean

diesel buses.

Metro now operates more than 1,400 diesel buses that run on ultra-low sulfur fuel and use special filters to reduce particulate emissions.

Officials agreed to continue running programs to reduce emissions in the existing diesel fleet, such as replacing 100 engines in older buses.

In other Metro action, the board approved sending the draft environmental impact statement of the Dulles Corridor Rapid Transit Project to the Federal Transit Administration, the next step in the process.

The federal agency will review and comment about the study, which outlines options for the Dulles project, including a \$3.3 billion rail extension from the West Falls Church-VT/UVA Metro station to Route 772 in Loudoun County.

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*The Associated Press contributed to this article.*