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Hybrids hit the road

STEPHANIE LONGO For Go Lackawanna

The County of Lackawanna Transit System took a step forward in reducing its carbon footprint on Friday when it unveiled its first four diesel-electric hybrid buses, made possible through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.



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The first hybrid COLTS buses were unveiled Friday.



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Sen. Robert Casey speaks with COLTS driver Mark Gifford as Commissioners Washo and O'Brien inspect the new bus.

Jason Riedmiller photos / For Go Lackawanna

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By the numbers

The hybrid buses were purchased with money received by COLTS from the government in 2009. They were on order with Gillig Corporation and delivery was delayed due to high demand. They are the first hybrids on the COLTS fleet.

The buses are up to 35 percent more cost efficient than regular diesel buses.

Hybrid models cost \$550,000 each, compared to \$325,000 for a traditional diesel bus.

"Even though they are expensive up front, we realize a savings over the life of the bus, which is 12 years," said Gretchen Wintermantel, COLTS communications director. "It does sound like a lot up front, but it does pay for itself."

The hybrid buses, which are also the first buses on the COLTS fleet to debut a dark blue and lime green color scheme on a silver background, will run on electricity when traveling at lower speeds, such as within the city of Scranton. Diesel fuel kicks in at higher speeds or when the bus itself senses the need.

COLTS Executive Director Bob Fiume said the hybrid vehicles stimulate the national economy while saving cash here at home.

"We are happy to say that their purchase has sustained two jobs at the Gillig Corporation in California where they were manufactured," Fiume said. "These buses will be a benefit to COLTS transit system and to Lackawanna County because of their fuel efficiency and their anticipated savings of at least 30 percent in operating costs. In return, we are also helping to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

"We are glad to be able to reduce our carbon footprint."

The four buses unveiled Friday are first in a planned bus replacement by COLTS.

"In 2010, we received a \$2.5 million Clean Fuels Grant, the only one in the state of Pennsylvania and only one of 36 in the whole nation," Fiume said. "COLTS is now placing an order for nine more hybrids, which will be partially paid for by this \$2.5 million grant."

U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-Pa.), who helped COLTS receive the Clean Fuels Grant through the Federal Transit Administration, feels that implementing hybrid technology will help create jobs nationwide.

"This is a day for celebration because we are showing here in Lackawanna County and in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that we understand what it takes to invent the future and part of that is making sure we are focused on using good, old-fashioned American ingenuity and know-how and manufacturing capability to produce vehicles for the future," Casey said.

"This is about the jobs today and the opportunity and prosperity of the future."

Lackawanna County Commissioner Corey D. O'Brien said the idea behind the hybrid buses came from an initiative by the county's Sierra Club to reduce the county's carbon footprint.

"We are going green, it is not just a phrase. It is something people do and we are working hard to make sure we are doing that in Lackawanna County."