

# Move to hybrids on right route

The Lackawanna County commissioners showed off their green agenda last week when they put their fleet of 10 new Chevrolet Malibu hybrids and a hybrid bus on display at Courthouse Square.

The hybrid autos were purchased recently for about \$25,000 each. The cost is about \$5,000 more than that of a regular Malibu, but the difference is expected to be made up in fuel savings. Through a free pilot program offered by OnStar Corp., the county will be able to closely track the use of each vehicle. Via a Web-based program, county officials will have access to a host of data, including frequency of use, daily mileage and fueling information that should improve efficiency and deter use of the cars for anything other than official business.

Some of the hybrids are replacing conventional county-owned vehicles. Others are being used by employees, who previously drove their own vehicles and were reimbursed for mileage. Three of the hybrids will comprise a pool for use as needed by county employees. Commissioner Corey O'Brien wisely last month stopped accepting \$282 monthly toward his personal car lease payment and said he will use a pool vehicle for his county business travel. Commissioner Mike Washo has never had a county vehicle or gas card. Commissioner A.J. Munchak has both.

Last year the commissioners cut from 15 to seven the number of county employees assigned county vehicles and called in numerous gas cards held by county employees. The availability of pool vehicles should trigger additional cuts.

The bus on display is similar to four hybrid buses the county transportation department has ordered for delivery next year at a cost of \$2.2 million that will be paid with federal stimulus funds.

The hybrid buses, which cost more than 60 percent more than a regular bus, are expected to produce a 25 percent savings in operating costs and reduce emissions by 90 percent.

The county could generate more environmental savings if it can get more people to leave their vehicles home and ride its COLTS buses. The system transports more than 170,000 riders monthly over 26 routes. COLTS is in the midst of its first extensive route study in 15 years. Hopefully it will reveal ways to increase ridership.

The county's efforts are laudable since they help lessen the nation's dependence on foreign oil, reduce pollution, and likely will generate modest fuel-cost savings.

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