

Greening Motorcoaches

Just like chauffeured transportation, the bus industry is working on establishing clean green programs and getting out the word to customers

By Jon LeSage

Charter and tour bus operators trying to get greener experience many of the same challenges facing other ground transportation segments.

While the recession has temporarily gutted green programs at many corporations, the concept will not go away. For motorcoach operators, solutions are already built into the equation because buses already meet stricter emissions requirements than other ground transportation vehicles and have the lowest per passenger emissions. The industry just needs to tell that story more clearly to the public.

U.S. EPA rules will require all retail fuel stations to only sell ultra low sulfur diesel starting on Dec. 1, 2010. ULSD is a cleaner burning diesel fuel containing a maximum 15 parts per million sulfur — a major step beyond the previous low sulfur diesel.

The EPA's clean fuel program also requires makers of engines and buses to meet stricter emission reduction standards, which increased substantially in the 2007 model year, with the requirement of diesel particulate filters, and will again in

the 2010 model year with the requirement of selective catalytic reduction.

According to an industry estimate, charter and tour operators are keeping motorcoaches in their fleets an average of seven years, which means that most of the bus fleet precedes the 2007 model year EPA changes. Running older buses on biodiesel has been a route taken by several operators, but it's not always clear whether this actually will reduce emissions.

ABA Forms Green Committee

LAST FALL, the American Bus Association started up its Environmental Committee, chaired by Darren Berg, CEO of Seattle-based MTR Western. The committee met again in January during the ABA Marketplace annual conference in Charlotte, N.C., and worked out more details of its strategic plan to promote motorcoaches as the greenest way to travel since they emit the least carbon dioxide per passenger of any vehicle and reduce traffic congestion.

"It's a consortium of operators, manufacturers, and consultants on efficiency

issues, including carbon calculations and motorcoach construction technology," Berg says. "We feel its ABA's place to be at the forefront."

The top priorities include advocating sound public policy and telling the public a great story about the bus industry's leadership role in preserving the environment, he says. The Environmental Committee educates consumers on the industry's green credentials, and is concerned that operators avoid "greenwashing," Berg says. Operators should not misrepresent their operational practices and how they actually affect CO2 emissions, especially when using biodiesel in buses. It's important that operators find out what emission levels the buses produce when using B5 and other biodiesel/diesel mixtures, and whether this actually meets their program goals.

The most important green goal is to increase fuel efficiency while buses are running, and this doesn't necessarily mean using biodiesel.

MTR Western is based in Seattle and serves eight metro markets from Calgary, Alberta to Los Angeles with its fleet of 169 buses. As part of its own green practices, MTR Western entered a carbon offset purchasing program in January 2008 (and was renewing the program as of press time for 2009) with



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the Van Eck Forest Project in California's Humboldt County.

The Van Eck Forest Project is considered the first forest carbon storage project with climate benefits certified by the California Climate Action Registry, according to MTR Western. The MTR Western program with Van Eck Forest has gone over well, bringing in House of Representatives Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as partners, Berg says.

Berg emphasizes that bus operators should stay updated on state and federal regulations, especially for their fleet practices. In 2005, the EPA mandated exhaust gas recirculation standards for diesel vehicle production, and the California Air Resources Board will probably require all buses operating in the state to meet 2005 EGR standards if

they want to stay on the road, he says. The states of Washington and Oregon are looking at adopting similar vehicle requirements, Berg says.

In the Chicago market, Colonial Coach is marketing its own green program by using 2% biodiesel, which is stored in its 10,000 gallon fuel tank for its 94-vehicle fleet, says Walter Niemiec, director of service operations. Along with biodiesel, the company's program focuses on recycling oil in its garage, using bus waste oil to fuel office heating, and using the right chemicals and solvents for green cleaning parts and tools. "Nothing goes to waste," Niemiec says.



■ **Krystal Enterprises' Krystal Hybrid offers fuel economy 35% better than other non-hybrid versions of this bus, and seating capacity for up to 36 passengers.**

Cutting down engine idle time also has been part of Colonial's green program. Drivers are trained to start buses an hour before take-off time, along with other idle time practices. This also has been implemented for buses Colonial operates under the city of Chicago's Pace suburban bus service. **LCT**

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LIMOUSINE OPERATORS EXPLORE OPTIONS



■ **MCI offers its Hybrid commuter coach to the public transit market. For the 2010 model year, MCI will introduce newer clean-diesel technology in the J4500 and E4500 coach models, which are popular in the charter and tour market.**

JOSEPH BRUNETTO, vice president of fleet and technology for MTC Limousine & Corporate Coach, Inc., in Bedford Hills, N.Y., loves exploring green fleet options. Whether its testing out a Mercedes Benz R320 Bluetec or a Krystal Hybrid mini coach, Brunetto always looks into possibilities for buying vehicles.

There aren't many options on the market yet for green buses, Brunetto says. The motorcoaches in the MTC fleet are not older than the 2006 model year, and Brunetto is looking at product options on post-2007 models offered by Motor Coach Industries, such as a diesel engine scrubbing system, which collects and removes soot from the engine. He's looking forward to test driving the Krystal Hybrid, an electric/diesel hybrid bus. One of the positive features is that the Krystal bus can idle and run air conditioning in hot summer months while still complying with no-idle policies, he says.

MTC buys biodiesel for its mini-coaches and motorcoaches at different levels, including B2, B5, and B10 formulas. Two years ago, Brunetto attended a seminar put on by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority on using ethanol and biofuels

in fleet vehicles. One of the practices he's implemented since then has been integrating biodiesel into vehicles at different levels during varying weather conditions. As the weather gets warmer, more biofuel can be used in the bus. "We've integrated biodiesel into the fleet," he says, "and it depends on the time of the year when diesel fuels become thick."

Like MTC Limousine, Olympus Worldwide Chauffeured Services, based in Atlanta, has been active in the Limousine Environmental Action Partnership. LEAP executive director Pat Charla has been guiding Olympus president Johan DeLeeuw, on building a solid green program to meet corporate client requests, and in conducting green office procedures such as converting paper documents over to digital formats and reducing paper usage by more than 65%.

Winning over a large hotel account from a company promoting green initiatives was an important reason for becoming active in LEAP, DeLeeuw says. While there's less corporate focus now on green programs during the recession, Olympus is still reporting emission reductions to sustainability officers on a regular basis, he says.

While Olympus doesn't own any buses, the company can farm out bus reservations to local affiliate partners. Buses are used regularly to fulfill transportation requests for a commercial property client in Atlanta, moving employees to offsite parking locations, DeLeeuw says. "We're able to sell a lot of bus service," he says, "and the profit is higher when using outside operators."

The buses aren't powered by biodiesel or other green fueling options, yet they're still an important part of Olympus' green program since they move 55 people in one bus instead of in 55 cars, he says. "Cost per passenger is also better," he says. "Cost is a big factor in this economy, as is safety and convenience."

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