

Alliance Alert
Winter/Spring 2006

Hello everyone, and welcome to the latest edition of the UCS CleanSchoolBus.org Alliance Alert. Since the signing into law of the Federal Clean School Bus Grant Program last fall, we have been waiting to gear up for the next, important phase of our efforts--namely securing the needed funding to make this new program a true success. With Congress' return and the start of the Federal appropriations cycle for Fiscal Year 2007, the time has come for those who want school buses around the country that fully protect our kids' health to make their opinion heard. So let's take a look at some of the most recent Clean School Bus developments and start driving toward a cleaner, safer school year for our children.

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EPA Gives School Bus Grants--Need Overwhelms Money

In February, the EPA issued its Clean School Bus USA program grants from the \$7.5 million appropriated for it in Fiscal Year 2005. According to an EPA statement the grants will help fund the cleanup of more than 500 tons of diesel emissions from 4000 school buses nationwide.

"Today's clean school bus grants mean that the only thing pouring out of school buses will be students - not diesel emissions," said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson in a press release. "President Bush and EPA are committed to making that black puff of diesel smoke from school buses something you only read about in history books."

As we know, however, the "black puff of diesel smoke" from a School Bus tailpipe is emblematic, but not the only major threat from school bus emissions. On a very positive note, the 37 grants were very much in keeping with the EPA's promise to increase emphasis on replacing older, dirtier school buses, and on using the best and most appropriate technologies to protect children's health. The EPA funded replacement initiatives in Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Washington. There was a substantial expansion of grants for particulate filters. In addition, EPA is increasing funding for crankcase emission filtration, which studies have suggested are key to cleaning up hazardous emissions inside the bus. Such programs will receive increased emphasis with passage of the new Federal Clean School Bus Grant Program that will provide additional guidance to EPA on spending federal dollars.

While the grants themselves showed the government squarely on the correct track for defining and tackling the school bus emissions issue, the \$7.5 million in grant money showed the gap between state and school district interest in this issue, and the available funds to get the job done. 79 percent of the total number of grant applications had to be turned down due to lack of funds, and the \$7.5 million represented only 17 percent of the total funds requested. Indeed, the money was short even on the 37 projects that did receive grant money, as the total requested for those projects totaled almost \$11 million. The total amount requested in the over 170 grant applications totaled almost \$50 million.

Details on the individual grants can be found on the EPA's Clean School Bus USA website [here](#).

Legislative Update: School Bus, Clean Diesel Grants, State Air Agencies and Appropriations

As you know, the Clean School Bus program passed as part of the energy bill last year after much hard work from the Clean School Bus Alliance. Another more general diesel cleanup effort, the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA), was also included in the energy bill, and would fund diesel cleanup in all sectors. In the President's budget request to Congress, the President combined both programs into a request for \$50 million for Clean Diesel grants generally.

EPA officials have assured us that Clean School Bus will remain a priority, and that if appropriated, the \$50 million will include funding for clean school buses to continue EPA's Clean School Bus USA program and will take into account the authorization passed for clean school bus as part of the Energy and Transportation bills last year. In a letter to Senators Voinovich and Clinton, EPA states, "... I assure you that, [if Congress appropriates the funding to DERA], our intent would be to continue the Clean School Bus USA program as part of our broader efforts to provide funding to reduce diesel emissions." Considering that for last year total funding for diesel cleanup was \$12.7 million (including Clean School Bus), and that this is one of the few items in EPA's budget that actually increased, this, overall, is a positive sign.

Unfortunately, the President's budget also cuts funding for the State air agencies that will help implement the funding for clean school buses, broader clean diesel programs, and a host of air pollution reduction initiatives. We are also working to restore the proposed 35 million dollar cut for those programs, which is critical for clean air generally as well as clean diesel.

Alliance Action: As the appropriations process gears up, we now have our first opportunity to focus Congressional attention on the funding issue. Senators Voinovich (R-OH), Clinton (D-NY), and Carper (D-DE) have drafted letters supporting the President's request on diesel cleanup and restoring the State Air Agency funding to send to members of the Appropriations Committee, and are looking for other Senators to join them on these letters. Please call or write your Senators and ask

them to contact Senator Voinovich or Senator Carper's office to add their name to the Diesel Emissions Appropriations and State Air Agency letters. Getting as many Senators as possible on these letters to the Appropriations Committee will greatly increase the likelihood of getting the \$50 million dollars for diesel cleanup and restoring the 35 million dollars for state air quality programs. You may also email your letter using our online template at www.cleanschoolbus.org.

Preview: UCS School Bus Report Card 2006

In 2002, UCS released its first Pollution Report Card on America's school bus fleets. Since that time, both efforts to clean up school bus emissions, and our understanding of the sources and effects of these emissions on kids' health have increased substantially. We are pleased to announce that in May, UCS will be releasing a brand new report that looks at the progress that has been made in each state, and the challenges that remain to help bring all of our nation's school buses to the cleanest possible level. Here are a few interesting facts from the upcoming report: The average school bus is 9 years old and emits nearly two times more pollution per mile than a big rig truck. Nationally, soot pollution has been reduced over two percent through local, state and federal actions since the publication of the first Pollution Report Card.

Over 20 states had little or no clean school bus initiatives in 2005. Twelve states scored above the national average, with active clean school bus programs reducing pollution between 2.5 and 7 percent. Far more facts and figures will be forthcoming in a couple of months.

Issue Overview: Hybrid School Buses

Hybrid technology is becoming an increasingly vibrant segment in the transit bus industry. As noted in the UCS HybridCenter.org watchdog on this issue, transit departments from all over the nation are looking at this technology for both emissions and fuel expenditure reductions.

From an ideal perspective, hybrid technologies could give two distinct advantages for school bus use. First and most simple would be the reduction of the use of fuel. With the Energy Information Administration projecting sustained high oil prices, the increased up front costs of a hybrid school bus is far easier to justify (a hybrid transit bus can cost up to \$200,000 more than a typical diesel bus). Also, given that school buses are often involved in city transit, and idle frequently for loading and unloading of students, the capacity of full hybrid technology to turn off its gasoline (or diesel) engine while at a stoplight or idling in front of a school could represent a major decrease in both in-cabin and tailpipe emissions at the most sensitive times for children's health.

Recent tests confirm that hybrid transit buses can save fuel, but not all buses achieve their full potential. Orion VII series-hybrid buses operated by New York City Transit (NYCT) on the city's most severe duty cycles achieved up to 45% better fuel economy than diesel buses and 100% improvement compared to comparable natural gas buses on an energy-equivalent basis, according to the results of a study released by the

National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). The Connecticut Department of Transportation, on the other hand, performed in-use testing that shows their hybrid buses netting only a 10 percent improvement in fuel economy relative to a comparable conventional diesel bus.

Hybrid technologies have the potential to reduce soot emissions, but again, not all buses are optimized to reduce soot. In fact, a recent study by the University of Connecticut found no decrease in particulate emissions from two hybrid buses compared with two conventional diesel buses in over-the-road tests.

According to a report from WomanMotorist.com, IC Corporation, North America's largest school bus manufacturer, working with hybrid system manufacturer, Enova Systems, Inc., plans to introduce the nation's first hybrid school bus in regular service this spring. As a point of history, in the early 2000s, a consortium comprising of EVERmont, NAVC, Solectria Corp. and Bluebird Corp. did convert a Bluebird school bus into a hybrid electric one. Testing showed substantial reduction in fuel usage and emissions compared to a comparable diesel-powered school bus. The report also notes that The Hybrid Electric School Bus (HESB) project managed by Advanced Energy in North Carolina recently received funding from the State Technologies Advancement Collaborative that could put hybrid electric school buses on the road in two years. The funding will be used to help purchase 20 hybrid electric school buses that will be put in operation in eleven states around the country to determine their feasibility under a variety of operating conditions.

Given the specific functions of a school bus, it will be interesting to monitor the development of hybrid school bus technology and see whether the applications and benefits merit the fiscal investment needed.

To respond to any of the campaign queries, to unsubscribe to the Clean School Bus Alliance Alert, or if you have questions of your own, please contact Scott Nathanson at (202) 223-6133 x5454 or cleanschoolbus@ucsusa.org