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## U. Michigan area transportation authority gets greener

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The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority's announcement this week that it will purchase at least 13 hybrid buses in the next year should come as no shock. Initiatives from the past couple of years - notably the purchase of **biodiesel** buses and the promotion of a regional light rail system -- show that Ann Arbor is pushing for more efficient and eco-friendly public transportation. Being environmentally conscious is becoming not only more fashionable but also necessary to combat global warming. It's good to see that Ann Arbor is keeping pace in the push to become a truly green city.

The AATA refers to itself as a "pioneer among transit operators nationwide in pursuing cleaner air." Looking at the bus line's history of incorporating cleaner fuels and becoming one of the first transit systems to have all of its buses use ultra-low-sulfur fuel in 2002, the AATA probably does have some bragging rights. But the costs associated with becoming more energy efficient and ecologically sound have prevented it from fully adopting contemporary alternative energy in recent years.

Only seven of AATA's 75 buses use **biodiesel**. Biodegradable and non-toxic, **biodiesel** reduces carbon emissions by 50 percent and, because it is produced domestically, is considered the solution to ending the country's addiction to foreign oil. The AATA has not fully adopted this alternative fuel because it costs about 10 percent more per gallon than regular diesel.

This added cost to becoming greener is perhaps what led the AATA to explore the possibility of hybrid buses. The Ann Arbor News reported that while initially more expensive than diesel or **biodiesel**-fueled buses, hybrids could save the city more than \$9,000 each every year. If more buses are purchased in upcoming years and are maintained, the city could save more than \$2 million in fuel costs over the next decade.

What makes these buses even more attractive to the city is the fact that the added initial cost of the buses will be offset by funding from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program. Economically speaking, these buses will be a great addition to the city's public transportation system, which is rarely considered an asset to the city's finances.

The use of hybrid buses -- which consume about 40 percent less fuel than diesel buses -- is a great way for Ann Arbor to revive its identity of being a pioneer in environmentally sensible activism. If more hybrid buses are purchased in the next year, as AATA Executive Director Greg Cook promises, it will show that Ann Arbor is looking ahead to the future of the environment and taking care of its city.

A strong and innovative public transportation system is also necessary for any city looking to expand and encourage more businesses to move in. Ann Arbor's transportation revitalization could be the first step toward promoting more growth in a city that desperately needs to make up for its recent losses.

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