

VIA unveils — and begins using — new hybrid buses

By [Josh Baugh](#) - Express-News

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A new VIA bus powered by diesel-electric hybrid technology is unveiled Monday at City Hall. John Davenport/Express-News

When buses start running today on VIA Metropolitan Transit's six express routes, officials vow they won't be as noisy or polluting — and they'll be a lot more luxurious.

VIA's 30 new diesel-electric hybrid buses are equipped with reclining seats, overhead bins, reading lights and free wireless Internet.

“It truly has the feel of a first-class plane ride,” VIA President Keith Parker said Monday, as the buses were unveiled at a news conferences.

Local officials said they hope the new buses will help grow VIA's “choice riders,” those who own cars but sometimes opt to use public transit to commute instead.

The new vehicles also represent VIA's commitment to a green future, said VIA board President Henry Muñoz. The transit agency is a 100 percent CPS Energy Windtricity user and also is adding compressed-natural gas buses and zero-emission electric buses to its fleet.

Mayor Julián Castro noted that the new green buses will help air quality in San Antonio, the last major U.S. city to avoid designation as a non-attainment city under federal air standards.

Local officials said they hope to increase air quality by increasing VIA ridership — which gets people out of their cars — and making the agency's fleet more environmentally friendly.

A common theme among leaders who spoke at Monday's unveiling was pitching a “new VIA” to San Antonio and encouraging residents to “give the bus a second shot.”

County Judge Nelson Wolff said that investments in mass transit is the key to San Antonio's future.

“There's not a lot of money left for new highways,” he said.

VIA's new hybrid buses cost about \$550,000 — about 50 percent more than a standard diesel bus, Parker said. The purchase was funded exclusively through federal stimulus dollars. Bus fares will not increase because of the new buses, Parker added.

By this fall, VIA is slated to begin running three zero-emission, all-electric buses downtown. The buses will have charging stations at the Robert Thompson Transit Center near the Alamodome.

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