

DAILY NEWS

Cleaner buses now: Step on it, MTA

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Pizza rat: For a lot of New Yorkers, the image of the enterprising, slice-wielding rodent epitomizes how filthy our transit system is.

Unfortunately, it's about to get a lot dirtier.

When the L train's Carnarsie tunnel closes for repairs in April, the MTA is planning to run 70 diesel buses every minute during peak hours across the Williamsburg Bridge into Lower Manhattan and across 14th St. — assaulting the lungs of nearby pedestrians, cyclists and infants with potentially deadly particulate matter, linked to asthma, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Transit officials claim it will be “clean diesel” with little environmental impact, especially since there will be fewer cars on the street. Presumably, this is why the MTA recently green-lit the purchase of some 200 new diesel buses.

But “clean diesel,” like President Trump’s “clean coal,” is an oxymoron. Diesel always burns dirty, particularly at low speeds and temperatures. These 200 buses will sit in traffic and idle on side streets, emitting particulate matter into the air, and eventually into our lungs.

For buses, where so much driving is stop-and-start, diesel combustion produces pollution that is devastating for human health. According to the city Health Department, vehicle particulate matter pollution

contributes to nearly 3,000 premature deaths and about 6,000 emergency-department visits each year. And an astonishing 13.3% of New Yorkers under the age of 18 are asthmatic — about twice the national average.

More diesel buses could only make these health problems worse. Not to mention the environmental damage they'd cause: The MTA's new fleet of diesel buses will emit about 5.7 million pounds of greenhouse gases per year.

How can the MTA clean up its act? For starters, it needs to quickly ramp up its purchase of electric buses, which at this point number only 15 out of a fleet of nearly 6,000 buses. To his credit, at a town hall last week in the East Village, Transit Authority chief Andy Byford reiterated his pledge that the MTA will have an all-electric fleet by 2040.

But that's not fast enough. Especially when you consider the health risks diesel buses pose and the fact that other world cities from China to Great Britain have banned diesel bus procurement altogether in favor of low-emission vehicles using electricity and even hydrogen.

If London can do it, why can't we?

It's true that electric buses are expensive, subject to production delays and need to be tested. But the L train shutdown would seem to be an ideal proving ground for more than just a handful of buses.

Second, to make up the shortfall of electric buses, the MTA could use new natural gas-powered buses equipped with special "near-zero" engines that cut carbon, particulate and nitrogen oxide emissions to almost nothing. These buses can run on conventional natural gas, or, even better, on renewable natural gas made from organic waste, which means they use fuel that's fossil- and frack-free. What's more, the MTA already has 800 of these buses in service that could be redeployed to 14th St.

Cities across the globe are proving that viable alternatives to diesel buses exist. At this critical juncture when 250,000 New Yorkers will need a daily alternative to the L train, the MTA should use this crisis as an opportunity to rethink its contract for new diesel buses and instead prioritize clean- energy buses.

Otherwise, we'll end up with a transportation system even dirtier than the subway.

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