

Reedley eyes alternative fuels future

KCUSD is first in state with five hybrid electric buses

By Ashley Testa-Burk

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Presently, there is no school district in California with more than one diesel hybrid electric school bus on its fleet.

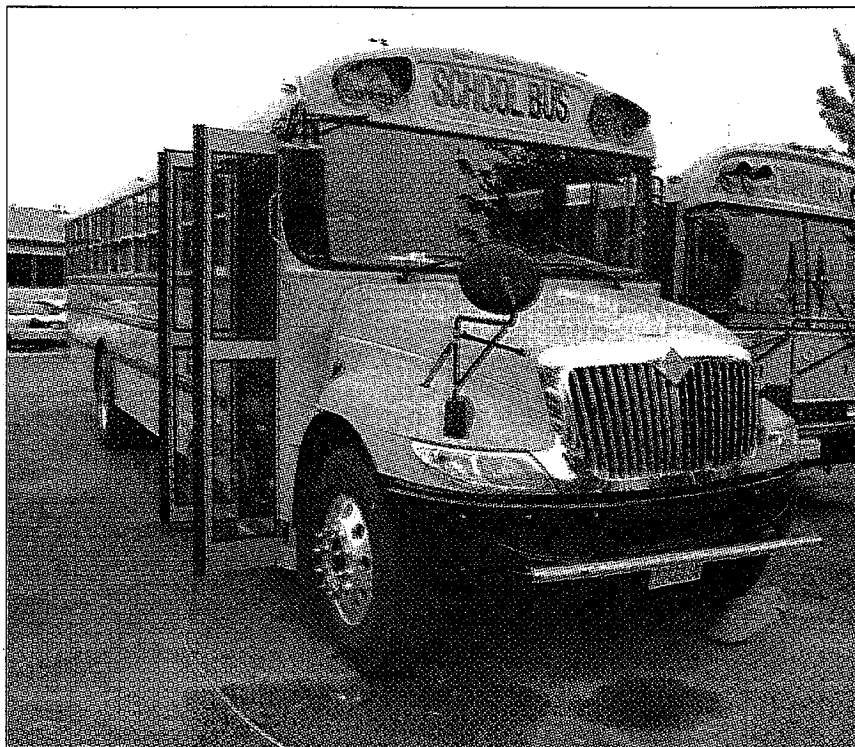
By this time next year, the Kings Canyon Unified School District (KCUSD) will have five of them – as the result of a unique, patchwork method of weaving together funding sources.

KCUSD transportation director John Clements has been working on the project for more than a year.

Last July, the school board gave him permission to work with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to replace up to 13 buses, provided that funding was available.

At subsequent board meetings, the green light was given to Creative Bus Sales' low bid, allowing the district to obtain the hybrid buses.

"I can safely say that we're extremely close to entering into contracts to replace five buses," Clements said. "It's an investment in



Contributed
Kings Canyon Unified will receive five hybrid electric school buses by next spring. The bus shown above is a charge-depleting model, which is equipped with batteries that charge when hooked up to an electrical grid or solar panels. KCUSD will receive one charge-depleting model.

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time, obviously, but the result is we're getting buses that are nearly fully-funded."

By Christmas, the district will receive two charge sustaining hybrid electric school buses, funded by the Lower Emissions School Bus Replacement Program (LESBP) from the Air Resources Board (ARB). An array of sources are providing funding to make this possible, including: the SJVAPCD, Fresno County Transportation Authority, Measure "C" School Bus Program, Hybrid Voucher Incentive Program (HVIP) and the US Environmental Protection Agency Diesel Emissions Reduction Act, under contract to the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

"These two hybrid school buses will replace two 1979 Crown school buses, each with nearly half a million miles of service in Kings Canyon Unified," Clements said.

By next spring, the district will receive two more charge sustaining hybrid electric buses, meaning that the engine will generate electric power as the bus travels down the road, similar to a Toyota Prius.

One plug-in charge depleting model will also be added to the fleet, with batteries on board that charge when hooked up to an electrical grid or solar panels.

"These three new hybrids will be obtained using CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) funds, ARB HVIP funds and then a small match from district funds," Clements said. "These three school buses are additions to the fleet and will serve our growing special needs student population and other route needs."

The CMAQ dollars are obtained from the Fresno Council of Governments and awarded through CalTrans. Clements said the funding will cover 88 percent, or \$635,400, of the cost of the buses.

All five of the hybrid buses will be equipped with air conditioning and passenger restraint seat belt systems, and several will accommodate wheelchairs with specialized lifts and floor tie down devices.

The first two buses, arriving before Christmas, are among seven buses that are part of the replacement program. Clements is hoping that the ARB, through the HVIP voucher system, will allow the district to have the additional five buses by 2012. This step in the process is still pending, but Clements is confident that the district will secure funding for \$40,000 per bus, leaving the district to fill a relatively small gap of \$12,000.

"It all adds up to about \$1.8 million worth of buses for about \$12,000," Clements said.

In the worst case scenario (if funding fell through), the district would owe \$92,000 out of its general fund to cover costs. Clements added: "We still have to roll the dice in a couple more locations."

Deputy superintendent Ron Hudson said the complicated method of acquiring money was necessary in today's economy.

"We live in a different time right now, in trying to get funding," Hudson said. "John has pieced together lots of sources to get these buses."

Air Resources Board spokesperson Mary Fricke said the purpose of the HVIP is to get "clean" vehicles on the road, research alternative fuels and improve overall air quality. With vouchers ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000, it is designed to offset the incremental costs of adding hybrid vehicles to a fleet.

There is currently no funding left for HVIP in light of the state's budget woes, but Fricke said the ARB will present a proposal next week to continue allocating funds for the program. She anticipates that the proposal will be granted, allowing school districts to "get these types of vehicles on the road sooner."

Fricke said the voucher program is unique because of its long-term approach to helping California meet its air goals.

"There are other states that have a program like this, but what makes our program unique is that we've set this up as a multi-year program," she said.

In a news release issued by the ARB, Executive Officer James Goldstone stated, "This program created an opportunity for California businesses to upgrade their trucks and proves that there is demand for technology that provides clean and fuel efficient vehicles."

HVIP is part of the Air Quality Improvement Program, established in 2007 by AB 118 to provide funding for advanced technology vehicles and equipment. HVIP is implemented by CALSTART, a non-profit organization that works with fleets to develop and implement clean, efficient transportation solutions. Last year, ARB provided almost \$20 million to help California fleets purchase over 650 hybrid trucks and buses.

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Ron Hudson
Deputy Superintendent
Kings Canyon Unified

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By Ashley Tes
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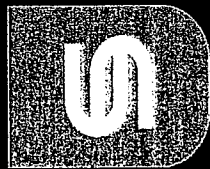
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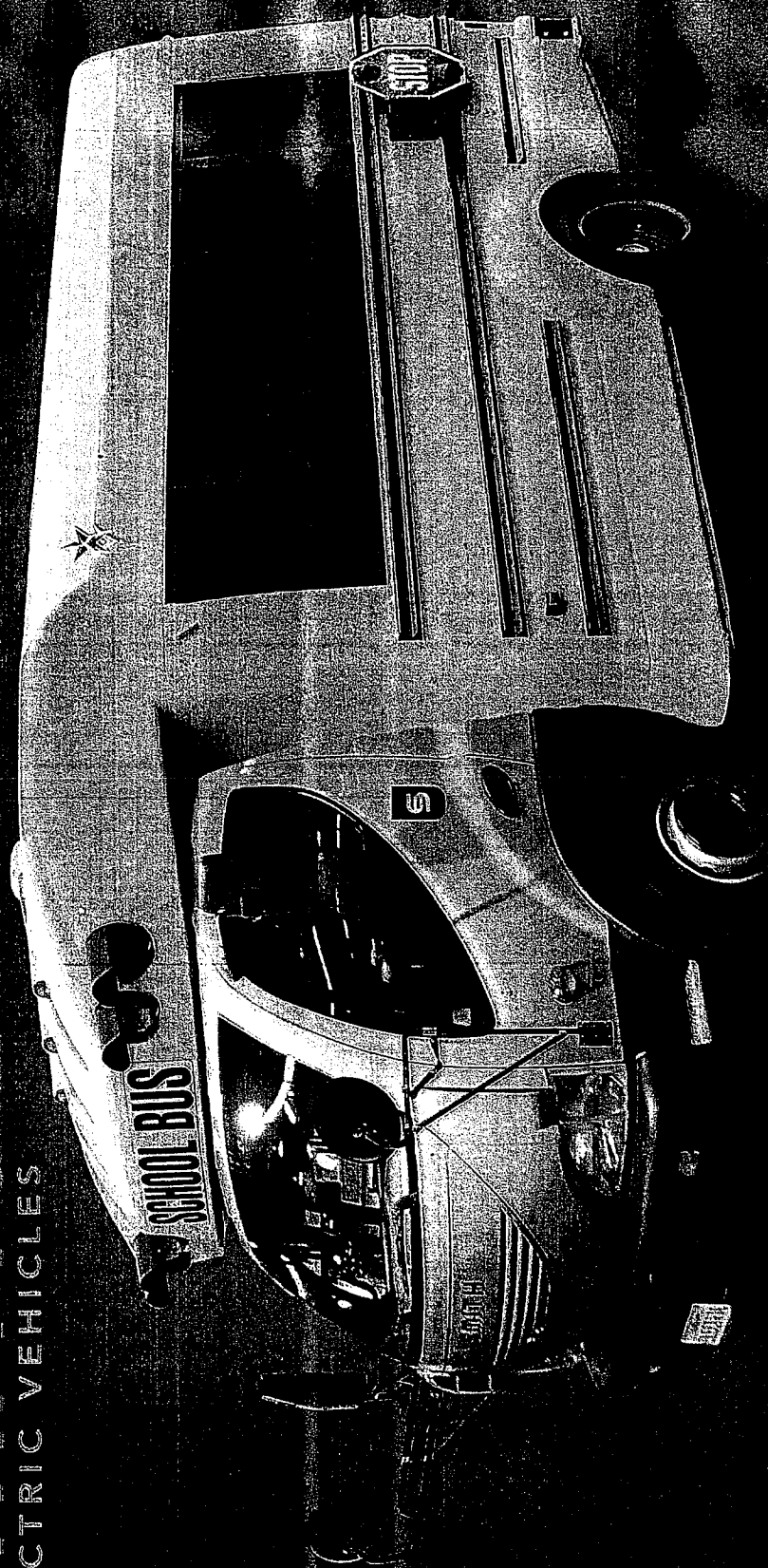
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