

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – Double Deck Bus

**Q Why did the City decide to purchase a double deck bus?**

A. Quite simply, we have routes that are over capacity and passengers have been stranded due to standing room only during peak times. This has been a continued complaint of riders and Cal Poly University, which helps pay for transit services in the City. After careful assessment by City staff, which included borrowing a double deck bus in 2008 to test its effectiveness, we recommended moving forward with the double deck purchase in 2009 to address these problems.

**Q Was this done with only staff review?**

A. No, as part of the Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) update process, which is required every five years, an independent consultant was hired to review transit operations and make recommendations for improving service. The SRTP, which was approved by the Council in early 2009 after numerous public meetings, made a recommendation that the City should consider the use of higher occupancy vehicles (such as articulated or double deck style buses) for use on routes that service Cal Poly University and had leave behind problems. This report can be found on the City SLO Transit website at the following link: <http://www.slocity.org/publicworks/download/transit/srtp052709.pdf>

This purchase was reviewed and approved by the Mass Transportation Committee on March 11, 2009 and approved by the City Council on April 21, 2009 as part of the SLO Transit Capital projects process.

**Q Why was the double deck style chosen over an articulated bus that is used with other transit systems?**

A. Articulated (bendy bus) buses were considered as an alternative. Unfortunately, many of the downtown streets have small corners that would need to be retrofit for use of articulated buses. In addition, the Downtown Transit Center (DTC) outside City Hall on Osos Street utilizes five-45' head in parking spaces (sawtooth design) and would not allow a 60' articulated bus to be used without extensive and expensive retrofitting. Finally, the City has over 200 bus stops that could not immediately accommodate a 60' bus and would likely need additional parking removal to fit the longer bus.

**Q Did the City ever actually try out a double deck bus to see if it would be able to operate in San Luis Obispo?**

A. Yes, in November 2008 Alexander Dennis let the City use (without a fee) a similar model to the one ultimately purchased, and it was used exclusively on Route 4 for a month. As part of the test the City collected over 100 passenger surveys and received rave reviews by many riders encouraging the City to consider purchasing this style of vehicle.

**Q How can the City justify spending \$844,000 on one bus when there is a deficit projected for 2011-12 and beyond in the General Fund?**

A. Although City General Funds were not used for the purchase of the double deck bus, this bus was very cost effective in that it leveraged Federal funds with local grant sources for a vehicle that has made an immediate and positive impact on our transit routes. From a fiscal perspective, the purchase has saved the City money. Purchasing this bus allowed the City to take two older buses out of service. It also carries more passengers than two conventional buses, and has only one driver.

**Q Okay, where did the money come from?**

A. The funding for the bus purchase came from a number of grant funding sources that are primarily used for transit capital replacement: 90% (\$759,315) came from a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 grant; 8.05% (\$67,950) from an Air Pollution Control District (APCD) grant; and 1.95%(\$16,418) from California Prop 1B Bond funds.

**Q It still seems weird that we would need something like this to address a peak time issue...isn't it just a white elephant?**

A. No. Whether it's a roadway intersection width, water main size or sewer system, we have to design our infrastructure to meet peak time demand and the transit system is no different. The intent of the double deck bus is to allow for additional capacity that is needed, but control operational costs for the SLO Transit system.

**Q What does that mean, why not simply purchase two 40' buses and run them together for the additional capacity?**

A. The City pays for its transit contract with First Transit Inc. (who operates the buses for us) in part by the number of revenue miles that they drive. Adding another bus would double the cost for any "extra" service that is needed for the extra capacity. A double deck bus has more than double (81) the seating capacity of two 40' buses (72) but without the cost of the extra driver, maintenance, miles, fuel and pollution emissions.

**Q How much does a 40' conventional style clean diesel bus cost?**

A. Depending upon the equipment included in the bus, the costs range from \$375,000 to \$410,000 including sales tax and equipment.

**Q Did the City take any old buses out of service or did this just add to their fleet?**

A. The City permanently retired two buses, a 1994 and 1997 model that were both past their useful life as part of the purchase. In the case of the 1997 model, the agreement with the Air Pollution Control District required that a hole be punched in the engine block so it could never be used again and that the bus must be sold as scrap. Overall, the double deck purchase reduced the City fleet size from 17 to 16 vehicles, cost marginally more than two buses, and had a benefit to air quality by removing two buses with old emissions equipment.

**Q Are double deck buses being used at other Transit agencies?**

A. Yes, Unitrans in Davis, California, purchased 2 similar buses just before San Luis Obispo--and Community Transit in Washington had 25 under construction after the SLO Transit bus was completed. The Antelope Valley Transit Authority (Lancaster-Palmdale, CA) has been running double deck buses since the early 1990s with significant farebox returns. The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) in Los Vegas operates ninety double deck buses and other agencies such as Muni in San Francisco and MTA in NY City are evaluating the purchase of this style bus for their use.

**Q Can this bus be used on all of the SLO Transit routes? What about routes with low bridges and other obstructions?**

A No, the railroad overpasses on Highland Drive (on the Cal Poly campus) and on Johnson Avenue (Between Buchon Street and San Luis Drive) are too low for this bus to go under. The double deck bus can be used on five of the seven transit routes if needed.

**Q Doesn't this reduce the value of this bus by only being able to use it on certain routes?**

A. Not really. The double deck bus will be used on Routes 4 & 5, which do not have any low impediments and are two of our highest demand routes. Together, these two routes conveyed over 450,000 riders (330,000 Cal Poly) last fiscal year.

**Q Did the transit facility need retrofitting to accommodate this bus? What about washing?**

A. Yes, some retrofitting was necessary. The City owns the Transit facility located at 29 Prado Road and replaced three existing 12' manual doors that were more than 15 years old with three new 15'- 20 gauge doors that can be automatically opened using motors. Capital grant funds were used for this work. The bus wash on site is being evaluated for retrofitting to allow the higher double deck model to be serviced, but for the present time it is being washed by hand by our contractor without any extra cost to the City.

**Q The City is considering a fare increase for SLO Transit because of a budget shortfall for operations. Why didn't the City use some of the funds for the double deck bus to make up for the shortfall?**

A. Limitations on the grant funds did not allow them to be used for operational costs to run the buses, such as fuel or driver wages.

**Q How can I find out more information on the double deck bus and other transit issues?**

A. John Webster, the City Transit manager, is available to answer any questions regarding the double deck bus and any other SLO Transit issues. He can be contacted at 805-781-7121 or [jwebster@slocity.org](mailto:jwebster@slocity.org).