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NOTE TO EDITORS: A special preview of the new hybrid bus will be offered to media representatives from 1-2:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 4, at the headquarters of Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT), 5303 Pinkney Ave., Sarasota. SCAT officials and a representative of Allison-General Motors, developer of the diesel-electric hybrid propulsion system, will be available for interviews. Anyone planning to attend the preview is asked to use SCAT's southernmost entrance off Pinkney Avenue.

SCAT welcomes first hybrid bus to fleet on Aug. 7

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) is introducing the first diesel-electric hybrid bus to its fleet on Monday, Aug. 7.

To celebrate the more fuel-efficient hybrid, SCAT will offer passengers free rides on the hybrid bus between now and the end of the year. With its bright green-blue-gold-white design, the bus can be easily spotted as it rotates daily among the different SCAT routes. On Aug. 7, the hybrid will operate on Route 17, which runs between the Venice Train Depot and the Downtown Transfer Station.

The new bus is in the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) body style. This modern style has a curved front and rear with distinctive headlights.

The hybrid is the first of 10 the county has ordered and will have in operation by early 2007, making SCAT the owner of the largest fleet of BRT hybrid buses in Florida and, possibly, with the largest fleet of all types of hybrid buses. An additional 20 hybrid buses are planned for delivery in 2007.

The new hybrid buses are part of Sarasota County's commitment to reducing fossil fuel use through an initiative called the 2030 Challenge, which was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on July 11.

The hybrid will be more fuel-efficient than the standard diesel bus and will significantly reduce harmful emissions. The hybrid electric-diesel is 25-30 percent more fuel-efficient than the standard diesel bus, saving an estimated 7,000 gallons of diesel fuel per year. It also can reduce most emissions by more than 90 percent.

When the bus accelerates from a stop, the battery-powered electric motors assist the diesel engine for powerful acceleration. Once under way, the engine-driven generator charges the batteries. The vehicle's regenerative braking captures energy normally lost as brake heat, and returns it the vehicle's energy storage.

Allison-General Motors of Detroit, Mich., developed the transmission, and Gillig Corp. of Hayward, Calif. designed and built the bus.

The BRT hybrid bus costs \$500,000. A standard diesel bus costs about \$300,000. The hybrids are mostly purchased with Federal Transit Administration grants.

For more information about SCAT's hybrid bus, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000. For more information on current SCAT services and schedules, call SCAT at 941-861-1234 or visit the Web site, <http://scat.scgov.net/SCAT>.

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