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Ferry Powered by Soybean Fuel to Sail S.F. Bay

New Regional Transit Agency Gets Federal Grant for Pilot Project

On October 25, at its 1:30 p.m. Board meeting, at the Bayside Conference Room, Port of San Francisco Pier One, the Water Transit Authority will report on its success in obtaining a \$25,000 grant for a five-month test to operate a ferry using a clean-burning soybean-based fuel. This marks the first time a passenger ferry has been tested on soybean-based fuel. The WTA will be working in partnership with MARAD (the Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration), which approved the grant to cover some costs of the test, and Blue & Gold Ferry Service, which provided \$57,000 in additional funding. Blue & Gold fleet will dedicate one 400-passenger ferry, the *Oski*, run solely on biodiesel.

Jon Hie, Blue & Gold's VP of Engineering and Facilities said, "This is an exciting chance for Blue & Gold to lead the way in making environmentally-positive decisions. We are fortunate to have the support of MARAD and the WTA in making this happen."

Alternative fuel has been adopted for use by fleets of government vehicles in the Bay Area and elsewhere. For instance, in March 2001, San Francisco's Municipal Railway began a pilot project fueling four of its buses on Compressed Natural Gas; other S.F. fleet vehicles, such as Police cars are also run on Compressed Natural Gas. Biodiesel is being used in a pilot project to fuel 253 of San Francisco's U.S. postal trucks, shuttles at the San Francisco International Airport, and various vehicles in National Parks such as Yosemite, Everglades and Yellowstone. Only one other marine vehicle is run on biodiesel: a small research boat in the Channel Islands. Biodiesel is thought to produce less emissions than conventional diesel; the WTA will be monitoring emissions during the ferry pilot project to see how they compare.

Mary Frances Culhane, the Water Transit Authority's Manager, Marine Engineering, said, "Exploring the opportunity for biodiesel in the marine industry is important to our national effort to become less reliant on foreign oil production."

In 1999, the California Legislature created the San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority, a regional agency, to plan new and expanded ferry service, transit connections, and terminals. Among other directives from the state legislature, the WTA must produce a plan for using alternative fuels in marine engines and ground intermodal services. The WTA's goal is to produce a plan for enhancing the region's public transit system by delivering a cost-effective, convenient, and environmentally responsible ferry system.

(photo opportunities available by appointment)

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