



## Smart Transition to Zero-Emission Transit and School Buses

The transportation sector generates the largest share (28%) of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> While bus transit, which has about a quarter of its seats occupied on average, emits an estimated 33% lower greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile than the average single-occupancy vehicle, we can and must do better to meet the existential challenge of climate change.<sup>2</sup>

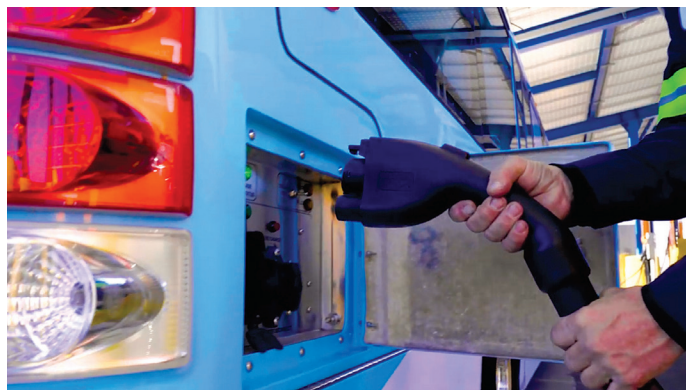


The U.S. Congress passed a massive infrastructure bill in 2021 which included billions of dollars to transform the nation's bus fleets from diesel to electric or other forms of zero-emission vehicles. The Federal Transit Administration under President Trump has continued to award these congressionally appropriated funds. The Federal Transit Administration announced that it planned to award \$1.1

billion in Low and No Emission Grant funding in 2025.<sup>3</sup> State legislatures are also leading the way on this issue, requiring that state transit systems transition to zero-emission buses, some with very aggressive timelines.

Recognizing that transit jobs are "green jobs," ATU supports these critical efforts to mitigate the transit industry's carbon emissions. Significantly, many of these new vehicles will feature powertrain components made in the U.S., thereby supporting local jobs.

The major issue for ATU members regarding zero-emission buses is training. Many maintenance and operations workers are not adequately trained to work on zero-emission buses, and the Federal Transportation Administration has concluded that technicians and operators require additional training to



1 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Fast Facts: U.S. Transportation Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2022*, EPA-420-F-24-022 (May 2024), 1, <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockkey=P101AKR0.pdf>.

2 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, *Public Transportation's Role in Responding to Climate Change* (Updated Jan. 2010), archived Aug 13, 2025, 2, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250714073618/https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>.

3 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, "Fact Sheet: Buses and Bus Facilities Program," Aug. 11, 2025, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/fact-sheet-buses-and-bus-facilities-program>; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, "FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity: Low or No Emission Grant Program and the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program," May 14, 2025, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/notices-funding/fy-2025-notice-funding-opportunity-low-or-no-emission-grant-program-and-grants>.

safely operate and repair battery electric buses.<sup>4</sup> Preventive maintenance on a transit bus nowadays is quite different than it was just a few years ago, when a skilled mechanic could likely have made do with the contents of their toolbox. Advances in computer technology have fundamentally changed the nature of the job. Yet, training has not kept pace, and huge skill gaps have developed. As a result, transit workers often lose out on work that they could easily perform, and overall transit safety is threatened.

While we support the important effort to transition the nation's transit and school bus fleets to electric vehicles, it is critical to ensure that resources are set aside for labor management apprenticeship training to ensure that workers get the skills they need to safely operate and maintain these new vehicles. As other industries have demonstrated, the best way to close skill gaps is through apprenticeship programs established through labor management partnerships. When both sides buy in, the results can be quite effective. While labor and management often disagree on various issues, in transit, we have recognized that by working together, we can provide training to workers with a thirst for the knowledge they need to move up the career ladder, while saving management precious resources that they can put into improved and expanded service. It's a win-win for everyone.

## ATU SUPPORTS:

- 1) Requiring transit systems acquiring zero-emission vehicles to submit a zero-emission transition plan, which examines the impact of the transition on the agency's current workforce by identifying skill gaps, training needs, and retraining needs of the existing workers of the system to operate and maintain zero-emission vehicles and related infrastructure, avoiding the displacement of the existing workforce;
- 2) Ensuring that no duties of existing transit/school bus employees are transferred to a contracting entity as a result of the conversion from diesel powered buses to zero-emission vehicles; and
- 3) Setting aside at least 10% of state funds used to purchase zero-emission vehicles to fund workforce development training, including registered apprenticeships and other labor-management training programs.



<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transportation Administration, *Procuring and Maintaining Battery Electric Buses and Charging Systems – Best Practices*, Prepared by Center for Urban Transportation Research, FTA Report No. 0253 (August 2023), 101, [www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2023-08/FTA-Report-No-0253.pdf](http://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2023-08/FTA-Report-No-0253.pdf).