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Commuting

TriMet switches all buses to renewable diesel, announces plans for fast-track bus line

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The transit agency plans to move to a zero-emissions bus fleet by 2040. Jayati Ramakrishnan

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By [Jayati Ramakrishnan | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

TriMet rolled closer toward lowering its carbon footprint, announcing on Thursday it had switched all of its buses in the Portland metro area to renewable diesel — a cleaner-burning fuel than the biodiesel blend they'd been using.

Called "R99," the fuel is a blend of 99% renewable diesel and 1% petroleum.

The move marks a significant step toward lowering greenhouse gas emissions for the transit agency, which had previously been Oregon's largest diesel consumer. Forty percent of Oregon's emissions come from the transportation sector.

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TriMet General Manager Sam Desue, Jr., said the agency is still on track for its goal to have a zero-emission bus fleet by 2040, but the switch to renewable diesel will cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 57% in the next six months.

Desue said renewable diesel is chemically identical to petroleum, but is made from renewable sources, including vegetable oil and natural fats, and contains almost no fossil carbon.

TriMet also switched all of its MAX trains to renewable electricity in June. It has been testing five electric buses since 2019, running them on routes that are in service more than 20 hours a day.

Desue said TriMet also plans to launch a new service next year called "TriMet FX," which will provide rapid transit along Division Street between Downtown Portland and Gresham.

Meredith Connolly, director of Climate Solutions Oregon, said her organization has proposed a three-fold approach to dealing with the climate crisis in Oregon: decreasing car dependency, electrifying as much and as fast as possible and cleaning up remaining fuels and replacing them with renewable diesel.

She said she was pleased to see TriMet doing all three things, along with plans to purchase 24 new electric buses.

Several public officials also noted that the switch to cleaner fuels will improve air quality for low-income and communities of color who are often disproportionately affected by diesel pollution, and also use public transit at higher rates.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, said lawmakers are considering legislation that would require more trucks to use 99% renewable diesel.

He said he hopes TriMet will serve as a model for other transit services around the nation.

"We need more people to be using transit," he said, "and we need to make sure that the energy used to run those buses and trains are coming from renewable sources."

—Jayati Ramakrishnan

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