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No-Emission Buses: How American Cities Are Driving Innovations in Vehicle Technology, Charging Infrastructure, and Technician Training

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U.S. DOT recently announced more than 130 awards totaling some \$1.7 billion for low- and no-emission buses and bus facilities. Vehicle technology is driving these investments—more than 1,800 zero-emission buses have been funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. But cities are also using federal infrastructure funding to deploy new charging technologies in depots and along routes, improve the resilience of transit systems' electric power supplies, and upgrade transit mechanics' skills for the electric age.

“Electric buses are a hard sell, but they are an investment in the future,” says Abena Ojetayo, Assistant City Manager, City of Tallahassee, Florida. In this session, cities learned about an additional \$1.5 billion is available in FY2024 through the FTA's Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities and Low- and No-Emission (Low-No) Vehicle programs, and lessons learned from cities' successful FY2023 proposals. Slides and video recording from this event are available at <https://localinfrastructure.org/resources/>.

Key insights from the discussion included:

- **Request the larger version of your project, but allow for scalability in funding proposals.** Noting the experience of Tallahassee and Albuquerque, Brandt Hertenstein, Programs Manager at the Electrification Coalition, pointed out that cities should seek funding for the largest project they think they can manage. But it's important to be prepared to scale the project to match available funds, in order to maximize the potential for application success.
- **Leverage workforce training requirements to maximize co-benefits of infrastructure investments.** A minimum of 5 percent of awarded funds must be invested in workforce development related to infrastructure construction and vehicle acquisition. Ojetayo explained how Tallahassee continues to expand opportunities with

local community colleges including apprenticeships, internships, and career progression programs. These partnerships establish a bidirectional flow of new skills into transit mechanic crews and of emerging training needs back into schools.

- **Keep trying, and show your work.** Tallahassee applied for FTA funds six times and was awarded twice. Albuquerque applied five times and won twice. A critical move in 2023 for that city was a more robust proposal (66 pages compared to 12 pages in 2022) that allowed the city to document its economic and environmental justice impacts. “Part of the process,” Payton explained, “is showing more of your vision and what you’re doing.” Notably, Albuquerque conducted an on-board survey to collect vital data on race and income of the riders the system serves.

Links from the Conversation

- [“City Bringing First Electric Buses to Albuquerque”](#) (City of Albuquerque, New Mexico)
- [“Electric bus fleet, \\$35 million investment in sustainable energy coming to Tallahassee”](#), August 3, 2023, *Tallahassee Democrat*

About the Tech and Innovation Center Series (T&IC)

The T&IC series is dedicated to helping local leaders navigate and understand the large quantities of information from the federal government on the nearly 400 funding opportunities available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The 2 year series is focused on how cities can leverage technology to improve their federal infrastructure funding proposals during 2023 and 2024. Programs focus on helping cities improve their proposals in response to Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO’s) by adopting state-of-art technologies, expanding their technology capacity, and integrating aspirational technology “moonshots” for their cities.

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