

Hybrids Introduced by AppalCART

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AppalCART, the public transportation authority serving Boone and all of Watauga County, introduced two new buses which begin service this summer. The buses are 35 foot long, 32 passenger Gillig hybrid low floor transit buses made in Oakland, California.



The buses use a smaller conventional Cummins diesel engine coupled with the Allison electric hybrid transmission which features electric motors which provide extra horsepower and electric drive up until 30 miles an hour when the conventional diesel engine provides motive power.

Due to the electric transmission the ride is smoother and quieter than conventional diesel buses. The buses should also deliver better miles per gallon which will help offset their greater cost. Each bus cost slightly more than \$500,000 and is built to last 12 years of stop and go service.

The buses feature a flat floor with no steps at the doorways. Unlike standard transit buses with the floors about three feet off the ground, these buses feature a floor only 18 inches off the road. Moreover, the buses have an air suspension system which allows the front end of the bus to kneel to a first step height of 10 inches.

The low floor and kneeling feature allow the bus to use a ramp instead of a mechanical lift for boarding people in wheelchairs. Another feature, designed to aid people with visual impairments, is called the Talking Bus. This is a device which calls out the next bus top for passengers based on the position of the bus. It is also used by passengers who like to read on the bus, so they can read until their stop is announced.

The buses use Twin Vision destinations signs at the front, curbside and rear of the bus to display the route being run. Reaction of the passengers and drivers has been positive so far. Funding for the buses came from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Public Transportation Division through a matching grant. The transit authority pays ten percent of the cost and federal and state grants cover the rest. Local contributions came from Appalachian State University, Watauga County and the Town of Boone. The buses have a planned life cycle of 12 years.

For information on AppalCART's schedules, check their website at www.appalcart.com