The recent article describing the KRT’s commitment to purchase diesel/hybrid busses at a $200,000 premium over a regular diesel bus is disturbing to me on three levels.

First I would suggest that the Governor Manchin Administration object to this purchase. Diesel fuel is NOT a purely domestic fuel, but a ***foreign fuel that is produced from 67% imported crude.*** By contrast, natural gas is ***natural*** to West Virginia, and with the Marcellus Shale development, there will be plenty of CNG available to KRT, at a much lower cost\* of fuel than diesel. Why is the KRT ignoring the Governor’s commitment to wean ourselves off foreign oil imports and transition to domestic, ***ideally West Virginia fuel?*** (\* thelast figures I had for CNG was $1.72 per gallon equivalent in Southern California)

But secondly, I object as a tax payer. Stating the Federal Government is the source of the funds is so deceptive. Well, guess what, we the people are the source of the Federal Government tax revenues that return, less a hefty management “fee”, to West Virginia and KRT.

Finally, I have more than the average citizens’ background in alternative fuels. As an engineer serving off and on as a consultant to the South Coast Air Quality Management District in Los Angeles in the 30+ years I lived in Los Angeles, (1967-1998), I was instrumental, along with Dr. Alan Lloyd, AQMD’s then Chief Scientist and officers from FedEx, in putting together the first scientific study of alternative fuels on a large operating fleet. I have remained close to the FedEx executives and have tracked progress in the literature. (Battelle was the program manager. The project was known as CleanFleet, and should still be available on the NREL web Page…www.nrel.gov.

In fleet experience with hybrids, the overwhelming evidence shows that hybrid trucks almost never pay for themselves in terms of return on the added investment. In this case, your article reports there is a 67% up front purchase price premium to gain 1 m.p.g. more. Except for some sort of “feel good” environmental hope, I would have asked how on earth anyone can justify that kind of marginal cost for such a miniscule fuel advantage, and an obvious lack of any ROI. (At least in a Prius, one gets double the mileage that would be achieved by a similar sized car.)

The bigger questions are why the KRT is so anti natural gas. They recently abandoned their CNG fleet. Why?

Several forward thinking municipal bus fleets around the country are equipped with diesel busses that are dedicated and run on compressed natural gas, (CNG). In Los Angeles County, ***the largest bus fleet in the country,*** SCRTD is so equipped. Besides LA, Seattle, Denver and several other cities and airports are running buses in numbers on CNG.

Now returning to the environmental issue, CNG in a diesel engine emits lower levels and fewer pollutants. CNG has always been cleaner than diesel…by a wide margin on most pollutants.

Then there are the maintenance costs. Anyone who has operated a hybrid fleet of trucks, or cars, will tell you that they are much more complicated vehicles, therefore more expensive because there are so many more parts, systems and things that can and do go wrong. It is true that the hybrid is more costly to maintain.  There is not a pay back on these hybrids in fleets *except for CSR (corporate social responsibility) which may satisfy the tree huggers in company.*

Add to that the life of the engine….particularly the upper cylinders. CNG is much cleaner than diesel fuel. Some fleet owners have reported that at 100,000 miles, opening the top of an engine is a surprise as the upper cylinders are still shiny and new looking, not all carboned up. The engine’s upper components may achieve double the life.

A diesel dedicated to running on CNG engine runs cleaner. There is virtually zero soot from CNG fuel, so the engine lubricating oil has less contaminates to wear upper cylinder components and therefore has improved life.  True that the extension of life is hotly debated among user - depends a lot on how maintained and cycled, loaded etc, but evidence seems to verify much longer engine life with CNG.

At end of day, the hybrid has been a transition vehicle until dedicated infrastructure can be put in place for other energy sources like hydrogen in fuel cells. Thanks to a very weird decision by the PSC, investors in West Virginia abandoned CNG as a fuel for the public in the Wise Administration. But in California, another State that has plenty of natural gas available in the State, there are CNG stations available almost everywhere. Honda and others sell CNG cars there. They also own a company that can provide a small appliance, known as a Fuelmaker©, at your home so you can fill up at night and be ready for the next day with the cleanest fossil fuel available that also happens to be lower in cost and extends engine life.

So Mr. Mr. Zack Harold, may I suggest that you revisit KRT and ask them to justify this huge marginal added expense that has NO hope of being a good investment, will worsen fuel costs, engine life and emissions. Why would they not be more prudent with my tax dollars by returning to our own West Virginia natural gas as a fuel…and help Governor Manchin to achieve his goal of reducing our importation of “Foreign” fuels?