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August 3, 2009

IndyGo Green: Numerous Sustainable Transit Initiatives Implemented in Indianapolis

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The nature of public transportation lends itself to increased individual sustainability. For years now, IndyGo, along with other public transit agencies, has been preaching the environmental benefits of riding the bus.

In addition to public awareness campaigns, use of federal Congestion Management and Air Quality grants, and promotional partnerships with governmental and community groups, IndyGo has made great strides in incorporating sustainable practices into its own operational processes and improvements.

Using a portion of its federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds and other grant dollars, IndyGo has been able to plan and design much-needed upgrades for its facility in addition to procuring new buses for its fleet. Using LEED-like performance measures, the agency will implement several upgrades to the building that will affect its energy consumption and indoor environmental quality. Among the energy-saving upgrades and installations are improvement of the building's envelope; energy-efficient glazing; air curtains for overhead doors; sun shading devices; energy-efficient light fixtures; and overall reduction in energy consumption.

Indoor air quality is an equally important concern, so IndyGo has introduced such improvements as a new ventilation system; chemical and pollutant source control and monitoring; and a thermal comfort system control.

Along with any expenditure it makes, a transit agency should consider financial prudence when choosing products and services with sustainable features. By funding improvements to the facility and reducing its corporate carbon footprint, IndyGo will find operational savings in the areas of utilities and maintenance through these capital investments. In addition, the better lighting and cleaner air should result in increased employee productivity and wellness, hopefully driving down absenteeism and health costs.

In recent years, IndyGo replaced its boiler with an energy-efficient one that uses less gas and electricity and, as a way to conserve water, began recycling water on its wash rack. When the transit system takes its buses through the wash for the initial spray, that water is then reused as rinse water after the soap has been removed.

Another sustainable facility initiative includes a document recycling program through which the agency disposes of old papers and documents in shredders; then bundles the remains and recycles them. In addition, IndyGo is entering into a contract with an environmental waste disposal firm for the removal of its facility waste products including oil, antifreeze, light bulbs, and cleaning solvents.

IndyGo's plans to purchase new vehicles include making sure sustainable features are part of the specifications for its Indianapolis market. The new fixed route vehicles will be 2010 models outfitted with newly federally mandated particulate filters and selective catalytic reduction engines. The paratransit fleet will welcome 10 new vehicles that run at 20 mpg, about double the efficiency of the current fleet: the carbon footprint on these particular vehicles is 43 percent less than the standard paratransit coach. The agency also is investing in hybrid vehicles to replace six supervisor mini-vans.

Passing on the IndyGo Green mission to its passengers, the agency has been proactive in installing solar lighting in many of its shelters and individual bus stops. This safety feature not only enhances the safety of these stops, but serves as a clear demonstration of its commitment to the local environment.

Being a good steward of taxpayer dollars means making sound procurements and investments while considering how it all impacts the environment. IndyGo's goal is always to consider the sensible and sustainable choices when doing business. How can the agency ask commuters to start riding the bus to help save the environment if the company isn't working toward the same goal?