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PVTA lands $16.2 million stimulus windfall

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SPRINGFIELD - The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority will receive $16.2 million in federal stimulus money to buy 29 buses and three vans to replace part of its aging fleet, according to the authority.

Each bus costs around $370,000, while vans are around $55,000, and typically take between 12 and 18 months to produce because there are only so many bus manufacturers, said Jill Holliday, authority marketing director.

The buses will replace 29 existing ones, which are around 14 years old - two years beyond their typical 12-year lifespan. The new vehicles will be distributed to each of the three garages in the PVTA service area, located in Northampton, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and in Springfield, where the authority is based.

The stimulus money will also fund "new fare boxes, cameras for the ADA vans (used for the elderly and disabled), and several rehabilitation construction projects such as improvements to the UMass garage," said Holliday.

The authority plans to pay up front for the buses until the stimulus money is received, said Holliday, who was unsure of a timetable for the funding.

The PVTA was notified of its stimulus funding by the Federal Register, the official publication for governmental notices. The $16.2 million is separate from the $10 to $11 million in federal money the authority receives annually, Holliday said.

New solar panels

There is also a plan to add solar panels to the roofs of bus stop shelters. The energy from the panels will be used to illuminate the area at night and provide more security, said Holliday.

According to the PVTA Web site, **www.pvta.com**, federal funds must be used for capital projects and "may only be spent on tangible items such as equipment, preventive maintenance of vehicles, facilities and equipment, ADA services, facility improvements and the purchase of vehicles."

Holliday said the buses removed from the fleet will meet different fates.

"Some of the vehicles are bid on by agencies and people needing them, especially the vans; sometimes we take parts from them or sometime they go to scrap," Holliday said.

The PVTA, created by state mandate in 1974, is the largest regional transit authority in the commonwealth, with 177 buses, 175 vans and serves 24 area communities. All of the authority's buses use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel.

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