

TRANSPORT

Electric buses get mixed views

Cosatu says money should instead be used to improve security on transport routes

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GOLDEN Arrow Bus Services' first-of-its-kind electric buses received a lukewarm reception from some, despite the fanfare with which they were introduced.

The launch at the Gabs depot in Montana, next to Cape Town International Airport, was after testing of two electric buses in Cape Town, and these would now be incorporated into Golden Arrow's day-to-day operations, carrying passengers between Retreat and Cape Town, starting this month.

Gabs engineer Gideon Neethling said the testing phase of the electric buses had been rigorous. He said for the first few months, they tested the buses in a range of circumstances without passengers, with the aim of getting to know exactly how those vehicles performed before incorporating them into their operations.

He said there was much to be learnt about the bus, including electricity usage under different conditions, charge times between trips, possible scheduling challenges as a result of charge times, maintenance needs, battery degradation, and other general operational challenges, compared with the currently used internal combustion engine.

Gabs spokesperson Bronwen Dyke-Beyer said Golden Arrow's remarkable renewable energy journey started in 2017, with the pilot installation of two solar plants of 25kWh each.

She said the results were encouraging and led to two of its facilities being declared carbon neutral last year.

"Given the success of projects to date, Golden Arrow decided to take on its next project – testing an electric bus. The company has partnered with BYD (bus manufacturer) and uYilo (co-funder) to test two 100% electric buses for a 12-month period," she said.

ANC provincial transport spokesperson Lulama Mvimbi said the initiative was welcomed.

However, they would have loved it to be extended to the majority of the public transport operators, including minibuses. Mvimbi said they hoped the electric buses would be much safer.

"Gabs buses have recently been the target for crime, especially in the townships," Mvimbi said.

Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) provincial secretary Malvern de Bruyn questioned why the bus company was launching the electric buses while people were being mugged on buses almost every day.

"Instead, they should have used that money to beef up security in buses and on bus routes," De Bruyn said.

Transport and Public Works MEC Daylin Mitchell said the Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works and Gabs were working together on technology solutions to improve public transport in the province.

"My department endorses innovative programmes such as this one, given the challenges experienced by our commuters in the absence of the passenger rail system," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said the narrative about safety on Golden Arrow buses was very different. He said that after taking a ride in the bus, he was confident passengers would feel safe.

Mayor Dan Plato said although the City did not provide nor manage passenger rail, Gabs or the minibus taxi services, they wanted to ensure the public transport interchanges, where those services operated from, were safe, clean and well-managed.

This was after the City revealed yesterday that it had appointed a company to manage all its public transport facilities, as of last Friday.

The City said some of the services to be provided would include 24-hour security, including surveillance of CCTV camera footage, and 24-hour cleaning of facilities, which involves daily cleaning, hygiene services and waste management.

"Thousands of Capetonians use public transport to get to work and other destinations every day. Some use the MyCiTi bus service, others board minibus taxis, Gabs buses, or Metrorail trains.

"These public transport interchanges, minibus-taxi facilities and MyCiTi stations are beehives of activity, and keeping these spaces clean, safe, and well-maintained is extremely important," Plato said.



TRANSPORT and Public Works MEC Daylin Mitchell and Golden Arrow Bus Services chief executive Francios Meyer launched the electric bus.