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New Buses Arrive at Critical Time for SWITA

Agency obtains first brand new buses in nearly five years.

Atlantic, IA- Transit agencies across the country have been battling a major shortage of available new buses to replace aging fleets. Southwest Iowa Transit Agency unfortunately knows this need all too well. Record ridership combined with a lack of replacement vehicles has put SWITA at the top of the list for oldest fleets in the state and near the top nationwide. This month has brought some good news to start alleviating this problem with the arrival of five new buses.

SWITA recently took delivery of five 2024 Ford Glaval 18-passenger cutaway buses from Hoglund Bus Company. These vehicles were originally ordered in 2021 but have only now just arrived. A multitude of factors have contributed to this bus shortage and delay nationwide, but the issue was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of bus manufacturers in the country had already started to dwindle with consolidation but the pandemic caused the industry to shrink to two major manufacturers. Supply chain issues combined with reduced capacity further delayed production. Starting from the lack of available chassis to start with all the way up to high demand for competing products like campers. An added layer that has slowed things down is manufacturing requirements for the Build America, Buy America legislation. Stakeholders in the transit industry have been working with legislators and manufacturers to try to break through the logjam.

The pandemic also resulted in record investment in public transit infrastructure, so it's been a bit of a catch-22 to see results. Cost is another factor that has made procurement a big challenge. Back in 2021 these buses would have cost about \$86,000, but continued cost increases and inflation have ballooned that figure all the way up to over \$160,000 per bus today. Cost adjustments require contract changes, further slowing the process. That's why it is a big deal for SWITA to see some new vehicles show up on the lot. Ideally SWITA should take delivery of 10 new vehicles a year to keep up with wear and tear. Until that pace returns SWITA will continue to invest heavily in maintenance of existing buses and purchasing used buses where they make sense.

SWITA is excited to get these new vehicles rolling and will continue to put effort into improving the bus ecosystem.

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