

Three in four buses will be driven out

Matthew Xuereb



Out with the old... traditional buses will be a thing of the past, removed from the roads and placed in a Transport Museum.

Only a quarter of the current fleet of 508 buses meet the requirements stipulated by the reformed public transport system, Transport Minister Austin Gatt announced yesterday.

The rest of the buses - most of which are deemed a health hazard - will either be recycled or placed in a Transport Museum.

The government yesterday unveiled the specifications for the new buses and published the tender documents for the five bidders.

The buses forming the new fleet cannot be more than 15 years old. On the first day of the new system, a maximum of 70 per cent of the buses have to have low emissions (Euro III and Euro IV).

By the second year of operation, the Euro III buses have to decrease to 50 per cent and replaced with Euro IV. By the fourth year and for the remainder of the 10-year-contract, all buses have to be Euro IV compliant.

These guidelines are the minimum expected and any bidder will be awarded more points if he were to propose cleaner buses on the first day of operation, Dr Gatt said. At least 70 per cent of buses operating within Valletta, Cottonera, on the Attard, Lija and Balzan route and in Victoria, Xagħra and Żebbug routes in Gozo must be electric.

Buses would have to be parked off the streets at all times when not in service. They must also be equipped with a first aid box, CCTV systems and electronic displays of the destination both at the front and back.

They must also be right-hand-drive, well ventilated and air conditioned. Bus stops should have electronic timetables with the estimated time of arrival updated in real time and the operator must coordinate with other service providers, such as Gozo Channel.

By the second year of operation, an SMS information system would be in place, enabling commuters to text the name of the bus stop and the route they wanted and receive the estimated time of arrival of the next bus.

For the first time, a contract for the operation of the bus service would be in force, Dr Gatt said.

Malta, he added, had the largest ratio of cars on the road per square kilometre. This was costly and resulted in environmental problems.

He said that 370 buses from the current fleet were so-called Euro 0 and only a few could be used as vintage vehicles.

Dr Gatt said the ministry had an arrangement with Wasteserv to recycle some of these buses and others would be passed on to Heritage Malta for display in a transport museum.

The government, the minister said, would be improving bus lanes and making changes to the traffic system in order to give priority to buses.

It would also seek to upgrade the terminuses at Valletta, Victoria and Bugibba as well as the Blata l-Bajda Park and Ride and create new park and ride systems in Marsa and Luxol. The budget for this infrastructural work is €9 million.

Some of the reforms at a glance

- New service in place by the end of 2010;
- 10-year contract with obligations and penalties in default;
- New routes, covering also peripheral destinations never serviced before;
- Network to increase from 25 million kilometres to 46 million km;
- Buses of different sizes, depending on route;
- Fleet down to 270 buses from 508, used for 85 per cent of time they are available rather than 12 per cent as at present;
- Electric buses in villages with small, winding roads;
- Increased frequency and guaranteed punctuality and reliability;
- Service to run between 5.30 a.m. and 11 p.m.;
- Cheaper fares for frequent travellers, children, students and the elderly but higher fees for occasional users;
- Prices set by the regulator not the service provider;
- New hubs at Bugibba, Mosta, Luxol, Marsa, Paola, airport, Birkirkara, Rabat, Mater Dei Hospital;
- Extension of Blata l-Bajda park and ride amenities and new park and ride system at Luxol and Marsa;
- Eventual removal of the current subsidy paid by government - €45 million over last 10 years.

Who's interested

Transdev Plus Consortium - This is made up of one of the largest public transport operators in France. It teamed up locally with CVA Technology Ltd, the operator of the Controlled Vehicular Access in Valletta, Gee Five Ltd, a subsidiary of the Gasan Group, and locally-owned Leo's Transport Company Ltd.

NEX Continental Holdings SLU - A Spanish bus transport company.

Empresa Monforte S.A. - A consortium made up of a subsidiary of the Spanish Monbus Group of Companies, La Hispano Iguadina S.A., which forms part of the latter group of companies and Empresa Municipal de Transportes de Madrid S.A., the provider of bus transportation for the city of Madrid. These have teamed up with local company FMC Motors Ltd.

FIN-Part S.P.A. - A consortium made up of Fin-Part S.P.A, an Italian company which teamed up with Malta Land Transport, a Maltese company made up of 193 current bus owners, Arriva, one of the largest transport services organisation in Europe and the Tumas Group.

Llorente Bus - which operates almost 50 routes around the Benidorm/Alicante region in Spain and the Avanza Group, the largest private Spanish urban transport management group.

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Comments

chris reiff (6 days, 12 hours ago)

this actually is VERY good news. im only curious about the CCTV thing....why do we need CCTV cameras?

ALISTAIR BUSUTTIL (6 days, 12 hours ago)

some of the newer buses like king long buses have been equipped with airconditioning of which the buses where subsidised by the government ,some had their AC removed have you ever noticed them?and what did they do with it ?did they sell it ?

E. Azzopardi (6 days, 22 hours ago)

If 95% (very generous figure) of all buses emit this thick, black, smelly, dangerous smoke how can 25% of them meet the requirements? Beats me. Can somebody work out this one for me please? Thanks.

Paul Xuereb (1 week ago)

Will swipe cards be introduced to do away with the current system of paying drivers? The advantages are obvious.

Ing. Morgan Spiteri Staines (1 week ago)

Save The (Classic) Malta Bus

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Sign the petition <http://www.petitiononline.com/maltabus/petition.html>

We have organised a petition in the hope that many will choose to ask the authorities re-think their plans on what to do with the (oldest and historically valuable) classic Maltese busses... We believe that after they are Totally Overhauled, Serviced, Upholstered, Cleaned, Painted and re-Engined (with modern clean engines) they should remain in service as part of the new bus fleet that will be taking on the task of Malta's public transport infrastructure. Some could even be converted to an electric or a natural-gas drive train.

They should be used to service the oldest of Malta's villages and add help preserve some of the unfortunately-endangered Mediterranean character that these still have. Let's not lose this important part of Malta's character.

These vehicles have become a signature of the Maltese Islands way of life and they are appreciated by locals and foreigners alike. Yes, they are old but they can be economically brought up to standard. They are also an integral piece of Maltese History which shouldn't be simply cut-up and recycled like common junk...

James Wilcox (1 week ago)

This is sad... It's a pity that most of the busses that became a signature of the Maltese Islands will end up scrapped... In reality this was not necessary...

You could have even saved money by simply redoing the upholstery and seating configurations of the old busses and by replacing the engines to make them conform with modern emissions standards...

Some may argue that safety standards could not be met, but I can counter that by reminding that in the end current busses proved to be quite safe over the many decades and the cruise speed of busses needn't (and shouldn't) be high and there are various ways to limit speed such as mandating the installation of speed-limiting devices..

Tourists and other visitors, by and large, share a positive experience of the look and feel of the old busses... The service might have been crap and surely needed complete rethinking - But the (old) busses?... They are a piece of Maltese History and culture which shouldn't be simply kicked out like junk...

This sounds like another bit short sighted reasoning by the administration...

Joseph Micallef (1 week ago)

I wonder how the privatization of the route buses will effect school transport which use buses.

Steve Rogers (1 week ago)

Interesting to note that both the Gasan and Tumas Groups are interested in this transportation reform. Will another Minister receive free football tickets as well or will clients using the buses receive hampers at Xmas time?

Paul Barrett (1 week ago)

I wonder how many of the groups that were interested will continue to be interested knowing that they will have to use (and cannot get rid of) the same administrative staff that (from constant complaints about the current service) have failed to provide an adequate service.

The project as laid out above really does sound progressive if not a little too ambitious, it is such a shame that the Ministry has tied both hands and feet of anyone trying to make it all work.

My bet is that the project as strictly outlined above with all the other "small print" penalties that are probably in the tender, is quite likely to be doomed to failure.