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Metra to receive \$169.3m grant for zero-emission trainsets

Tuesday, October 17, 2023

Metra will receive the largest discretionary grant in its history – a \$169.3 million federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) grant – to buy battery-powered, zero-emission trainsets. Metra will be among the first in the nation to operate the innovative green technology.

The CMAQ funding was approved last week by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee.

A trainset is a group of permanently or semi-permanently coupled railcars powered by a propulsion system without a separate locomotive, with operator controls at either end so they can quickly change directions. Trainsets powered by batteries are currently in use in Germany, France and Australia, and Metra wants to explore whether they could work here. It issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for battery-powered trainsets in September 2022 and is currently reviewing proposals it received in response.

“We think zero-emission trainsets could be an exciting and positive addition to Metra’s fleet for a variety of reasons,” said Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski. “Beyond

the environmental and noise reduction benefits, they also offer savings in energy consumption as well as better efficiency, flexibility, and reliability. Along with our other initiatives, they would continue to make Metra a responsible and effective leader in green energy technology.”

CMAQ funding will support the purchase of up to 16 trainsets, adding a new type of propulsion to Metra’s fleet that could accelerate and brake faster than its traditional trains. The lower-capacity trainsets could be a more economical and environmentally friendly way to provide the same level of service or better, particularly during off-peak times, and could play a significant role in helping Metra achieve its vision to provide more frequent all-day service – so-called regional rail service.

Buying the trainsets would allow Metra to retire some of its oldest, most polluting diesel locomotives, which are well beyond their useful life, and eliminate tons of carbon emissions. It would also allow Metra to retire some of its oldest railcars.

Metra likely would introduce the trainsets on its Rock Island Line. That would directly benefit the air quality in several economically disadvantaged neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago and in the south suburbs.

The largest discretionary award comes after Metra’s record-breaking haul in 2022, when it secured \$204.1 million in competitive federal grants for Metra projects. The amount included the previous record for a discretionary award – \$117 million for the next phase of the UP North Line bridge replacement program.

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