



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 3, 2024

Taxpayers Taken for Ride by School District's Electric Buses

A Maryland school district wasted “millions of dollars” on electric buses that were not delivered on time and frequently failed to operate, according to an inspector general’s report.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) announced in February 2021 that it would be replacing 326 diesel school buses with electric buses “as part of its commitment to sustainability,” Montgomery County Inspector General Megan Davey Limarzi wrote in a July 25 [report](#). The school board approved the expenditure of \$168.7 million for the vehicles plus “charging infrastructure ... and related maintenance expenses.”



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The following year, then-Superintendent of Schools Monifa McKnight [claimed](#) that by purchasing the electric buses, “we are going to be saving upwards of 6,500 gallons of diesel fuel per day, and immediately, this is going to cut costs by 50%.” Egged on by a 2022 state law requiring school districts to buy only electric buses beginning in fiscal year 2025, MCPS plans to have “an entirely electric school bus fleet in 10 years” to help fulfill its “pledge of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035,” according to its [website](#).

Missing the Bus

In March 2021, MCPS contracted with an owner-operator of electric buses to provide the requisite 326 buses over a four-year period ending in fiscal year 2025. The contractor, who retained ownership of the buses, was to deliver each year’s expected vehicles by August 1.

“The contractor did not deliver any of the buses expected in FY2022 through FY2024 by August 1st,” Limarzi found. “Our analysis shows that for the first 3 years of the agreement, the anticipated allotment of buses was not received until the third quarter (January 1 to March 31) of each fiscal year rather than the first quarter.”

On top of that, the contractor has already notified MCPS that it will not be able to meet the 120-bus delivery requirement for 2025, which is hardly surprising given its history and the fact that it has only delivered 16 buses for 2025 thus far. Limarzi noted that “MCPS is negotiating with the contractor over the number and expected delivery of the remainder of the contracted buses” but only “anticipates receiving 30.”

One might think MCPS would do everything in its power to ensure that it gets its electric buses and thus saves us all from “climate change,” but one would be quite mistaken. While the contract allows MCPS to terminate it if the vendor fails to deliver the buses on schedule, the district has “opted not to exercise” this clause, “instead ... working to amend the agreement to potentially extend delivery of the



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remaining 120 school buses into FY2027,” penned Limarzi. Moreover, while MCPS’s diesel-bus contracts allow the district to assess fees for late delivery, the electric-bus agreements do not. “If MCPS had followed the diesel bus agreement model, they could have assessed fees of more than \$1.8 million to offset incurred expenses related to late deliveries.”

Busted Buses

Then there’s the matter of electric buses that don’t work. According to Limarzi, “Mechanical and/or charging infrastructure issues resulted in buses not being able to run routes on more than 280 instances from February 10, 2022, through March 31, 2024.” The contract calls for repairs to be completed within five working days, yet “in more than 180 of those instances,” that did not happen. In fact, repairs averaged “13 days per bus.”

MCPS’s contract did allow the district to charge the contractor \$100 per day for each day repairs went over schedule, but did the district do so? Of course not! Limarzi “confirmed that MCPS has never assessed the contractor any fees related to unavailability of electric buses due to mechanical or charging infrastructure issues,” relieving the contractor of a \$372,100 burden.

Limarzi’s office interviewed members of MCPS management and found that “none of them could explain why this fee was not assessed.” MCPS apparently sees no need to retain a contract provision it has no intention of exercising, so “newly negotiated terms will likely eliminate the fee altogether in a future contract amendment.”

Meanwhile, MCPS is asking the state to allow it to extend the life of its existing diesel buses and spending \$14.7 million on 90 more of them.

Taxpayers Thrown Under the Bus

Having discovered all this, Limarzi hoist the district on its own petard:

MCPS’s Financial Manual defines waste as “the extravagant, careless, or needless expenditure of MCPS funds, or the consumption of MCPS resources that results from deficient practices, systems, controls, or decisions.” MCPS’s failure to hold the contractor accountable to the terms of the contract and their decision not to include provisions to offset incurred expenses has led to millions of dollars in wasteful spending.

However, MCPS isn’t spending its own money but taxpayers’, so what’s a few million to give the appearance of doing something about the alleged threat of global warming?

After all, the problems of electric buses are by now well-documented. Cities from [Wichita to Philadelphia](#) to [London](#) have discovered that the vehicles frequently malfunction or even spontaneously burst into flames. Yet, the [Daily Caller](#) pointed out, “the Biden administration has continued to push for electric buses and electric vehicles more broadly, including handing out, or announcing plans to hand out,” nearly \$11 billion for states and schools to buy electric buses.

These days, it seems, “green” ideologues are in the driver’s seat, while taxpayers get sent to the back of the bus.



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