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New bus part of Hydrogen Fuel Initiative

Jessica Hall/Northwest Guardian

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Last fall Joint Base Lewis-McChord received a hydrogen bus as part of the Defense Logistic Agency's Hydrogen Fuel Initiative designed to accelerate moving hydrogen fuel cell vehicles from research labs to the real world.

The pilot projects implemented under the initiative have focused on making hydrogen fuel cells as well as using that fuel in equipment such as forklifts.

At JBLM, the hydrogen bus, which will serve as the green route bus on the new JBLM Duty Shuttle beginning Monday.

"The goal is to be able to introduce alternative means to get people around instead of taking POVs or GSAs," Tom Olsen, JBLM Directorate of Public Works Air Program manager, said. "This is the one (part of the project) that people can see driving around and can reach out and touch."

The hydrogen bus operates similarly to an electric vehicle. Electricity is created through the transfer of hydrogen cells over a membrane in the engine. As part of the same pilot project JBLM has a hydrogen fuel station on the installation.

According to Cpl. Gary Salazar of 593rd Sustainment Brigade, one of the drivers for the bus, it is much quieter than other buses.

"Even when it's on you can't tell that it is," Salazar said.

Salazar said he enjoys driving the bus, its exceptional suspension system and foot-powered turn signals.

"The bus is great, it drives pretty good," he said.

The bus produces no emissions, making it very environmentally friendly.

"The push on this is to explore alternative means to reduce air emissions," Olsen said.

The bus has been met with a lot of support from the garrison command and so far has been used for VIP visits but Col. Thomas Brittain, JBLM commander, hopes people use it and is keen on ensuring that enough JBLM community members ride it to keep it around.

The bus is on loan until October, when plans will need to be in place to either replace or lease it for longer or get rid of the program all together.

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Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian
A hydrogen-powered bus will be used as a commuter shuttle beginning April 30. Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian

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