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The Government of Belize, along with the Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) launched a pilot project introducing electric vehicles in 2022. The Belizean government eventually plans to purchase a fleet of electric buses to replace the 1960-1970s-era diesel school bus fleet that currently serves as the country's primary public transportation network. The Ministry of Public Utilities installed the first of twelve National Electric Vehicle Charging Stations in the tourism-focused city of San Pedro in 2022.

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Get ready Belize City, the new E-buses will finally take to the streets on Monday! Earlier today, the Belize City Council, the United Nations Development Programme, and other government ministries officially launched the E-bus service in the downtown area. The ushering in of this environmentally-friendly mode of transportation aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and comes as a green alternative to public transportation. News Five's Isani Cayetano reports.

The introduction of electric buses to the local public transportation landscape has been long in the making. It was part of a campaign promise leading up to the second term of the Wagner administration at City Hall. A pair of e-buses eventually came into the country earlier this year, just ahead of the March municipals. Today, they were officially welcomed on the streets of the Old Capital.

"Today, I am so excited being able to see this new transformative effort in the transportation system coming to fruition. That is enough for me. It will be transformative for the residents of the city, that is the key area here, the impact, the positive impact that it will have on our residents."

Electric buses offer several advantages for both transit agencies and commuters. These vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions, contributing to better air quality and reducing harmful gas emissions which is critical for a municipality like Belize City that can be overburdened by pollution.

"As you know, we have an obligation to reduce our carbon footprints. We just experienced a major concern with Hurricane Beryl, thank God it didn't hit Belize. But as you all know, the effects of climate change is really drastic and so these buses are low carbon emission buses, contrary to the ones we have running, and so the expectation is that it will contribute positively towards our environment and quality of air, and low carbon emissions."

Electric buses are highly efficient and have lower operating costs than diesel buses. Fuel savings are significant when comparing electricity with diesel, making these e-buses an economically viable option.

"Another key milestone includes the development of a cohesive low carbon transport electro-mobility strategy in 2023 which assesses the short to medium term market potential and readiness to rollout EVs in Belize. This draft strategy aims to update the national regulatory framework to support EV uptake, increase the supply of electric vehicles at the national level, develop charging infrastructure and improve knowledge and skills in this new technology."

E-buses have fewer moving parts compared to diesel buses, which significantly reduces the maintenance costs. This translates to cost savings over the lifespan of the vehicles. Overall, electric buses enhance the commuter experience by providing a greener, quieter, and more cost-effective mode of transportation.

"The ride, the amenities that it has there, a/c, the wi-fi, just having a different feeling. It's a clean feeling. Compared to where we were, this is significant for Belize City."

In an urban setting, electric motors operate more quietly than combustion engines, contributing to a quieter environment. EV charging infrastructure attracts regional travelers, benefiting local businesses and generating revenue. The charging depot at the corner of Dean and Regent streets is equipped with two 220-volt chargers that are able to charge both e-buses.

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Web: <https://www.hollanddutchtours.nl/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

