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Montco Sheriff and County Commissioners introduce new prisoner transport bus

Norristown, Pa., (October 18, 2013) - The Montgomery County Sheriff's Department (MCSD) parted ways with its old prisoner transport school bus and introduced a new custom bus designed for increased safety and lower maintenance at a press conference on the plaza of the Montgomery County Courthouse.

The purchase of the new ROHRER 2014 transport bus was part of a joint project between the county commissioners' office and the MCSD. When the new administration took office in 2012 and began to work together on the 2013 budget, Sheriff Eileen Whalon Behr made a strong case for a new bus citing safety issues, inefficiencies and high annual maintenance costs of approximately \$50,000. The commissioners unanimously agreed that a replacement was necessary and the new bus was purchased for \$145,000.

"The old bus was a problem for many years, and we are thrilled that we were able to include a replacement bus in this year's budget," said Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners. "This new bus will be safer, more secure and will allow Sheriff Behr and her excellent staff to be much more efficient and reliable when transporting prisoners."

Lt. Thomas McDonald of the MCSD said that using a school bus that was meant to hold children, but instead bore the weight of adult passengers and heavy mechanical safety features placed an extra strain on the bus, which caused transmission and other problems.

The old bus also lacked many security features and its unreliability created potential public safety problems, affecting the efficient administration of the courts, according to Behr.

The MCSD transports over 9,000 prisoners per year between the county prison in Eagleville and the Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown. The ROHER 2014 holds seats for 34 inmates and two deputies, which include the driver. Separation cages for females and high-risk inmates, attorneys and dignitaries are part of the new safety package, in addition to tamper-proof fasteners, fixed narrow

porthole windows and a multi-camera surveillance system with recorder capability. Several MCSD department members have already been trained on how to operate the new bus and will receive commercial driver's licenses to maximize safety.

Though safety is a top concern, according to Behr, the cost of maintaining the bus is also a critical issue during budget tightening times. The new bus has been built with stainless steel reinforcements, fiberglass seating, LED lights and marine grade subflooring, which will keep maintenance costs lower over the long-term.

Occasionally the bus is used for other purposes. It has been used to transport judges to Sheriff John Durante's funeral; to bring juries and attorneys to crime scenes; to provide transportation for jury details during sequesters; to provide assistance in riot control and mutual aid; to assist the C.E.R.T. Team; to transport criminals from the Phillies World Series game riots; and to transport kids for the Scared Straight Program.

The old transport bus is still sitting in the garage. Its future is unknown. But, ideas such as selling it for parts are on the table according to Behr.



Commissioner Josh Shapiro (left) talks about the bus collaboration with Sheriff Eileen Behr (center) and Lt. Thomas McDonald(right).

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