

WWJ Newsradio 950



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Clean Transportation Expo and Awards Gala Draws 250

I spent my Wednesday evening as master of ceremonies for the initial Michigan Clean Transportation Expo and Awards Gala, a new event sponsored by NextEnergy, the Greater Lansing Area Clean Cities Coalition and the Clean Energy Coalition to encourage more development of environmentally friendly auto and truck transport.

What fun -- a huge exhibit of high-tech clean diesel, hybrid, hydraulic and fuel cell cars (which you can see above), and a bunch of folks (250 actually) who really care about the environment and the future, and a sold-out dinner with terrific speeches.

Ann Arbor Mayor John Hieftje, whose city took home one of two Michigan Clean City of the Year Awards at the event, was the first speaker, talking up his city's Green Fleets Program, begun in 2004. His city has reduced the number and size of the vehicles it uses, and increasing use of biofuels, compressed natural gas, and electric vehicles, all of which has cut the city's use of gasoline and diesel fuel by 14 percent since 2003. The city has also reduced its carbon dioxide output by 290 tons a year.

Heiftje also said his city enjoys power from two hydroelectric dams and uses hybrid buses, which also offer the benefit of 30 percent lower maintenance costs, and uses passive solar devices that double as public art to heat its pools.

Ann Arbor is also in the midst of a massive switchover to LED lighting for its streetlamps and traffic signals, and may be moving soon into high-tech touches like turning street lights down low unless motion detectors show there's a car or pedestrian on the road, and street lights that blink in front of a house that's called 911.

He also sharply criticized Michigan and the United States for not moving more aggressively into solar and wind power, as Canada has.

Next, Dan Randomski, vice president of industry services at NextEnergy, talked up the state's renewable energy industry accelerator. And John Hertel, CEO and general secretary of the Regional Transit Coordinating Council, talked up his group's low-key plan to bring light rail back to metro Detroit. (He also bemoaned the loss of the Interurban light rail system that linked most Michigan cities in the 1940s, and the loss of Detroit's streetcars in the 1950s.) Rachel Kuntzsch, executive director of the Lansing Area Clean Cities Coalition, also spoke about the entire Department of Energy clean cities program to encourage the use of cleaner vehicles.

The evening wrapped up with a presentation from David Berdish, manager of Ford Motor Co.'s Urban Mobility Networks, an effort that aims to create an integrated urban system of mass transit, low-tech vehicles like bicycles and rickshaws, and, yes, automobiles, to create a transportation infrastructure in the world's growing -- and increasingly crowded -- cities.

As for the awards, they were presented as follows:

- * Clean Transportation Technology Innovation Award, won by Fisher Coachworks, for the development of its advanced technology hybrid bus.
- * Alternative Fuel Supplier of the Year Award, won by RKA Petroleum Companies of Romulus for its efforts to advance biofuel marketing and use in Michigan.
- * Michigan Clean City of the Year Award, a tie between Taylor and Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor's exploits were discussed above; in Taylor the city has incorporated natural gas vehicles and hydrogen powered Ford focus vehicles, and runs its diesel fleet on B5 biodiesel.
- * Small Business Clean Transportation Leadership Award, won by Clean Emissions Fluids for its FAST (Fluids Affordable STored) system, which offers on-demand, variable ratio biofuel blending on location.
- * Michigan Clean Transportation Community Leader Award, presented to Art Van for a pilot program with the National Biofuels Energy Laboratory at NextEnergy to use B20 biodiesel in furniture delivery vans.
- * Media Clean Transportation Awareness Award, won by WJBK Fox 2 for its work in raising awareness and understanding among the public for clean transportation alternatives.
- * Energy Independence Award, won by Meijer for its success in reducing petroleum consumption through the installation of public biofuel pumps, particularly E85, and clean transportation moves within its fleet.
- * The Corporate Clean Transportation Leadership Award went to Bosch Group for its long history of clean technology research and development.
- * The Public Fleet Manager of the Year Award went to Wayne Hettler of the St. Johns Public Schools for its leadership in encouraging the use of alternative fuels, vehicles, and fuel economy practices in the school district. He's pushed the use of B20 biodiesel, recycled motor oil, and recapped rear tires.
- * The Private Fleet Manager of the Year Award went to Dave Konopka of A.D. Transport Express for his efforts to push alternative fuels and idle reduction technologies in the A.D. Transport fleet.

The day began with presentations on hybrid and greener railroad locomotives, biofuels fleet management, fuel efficiency for motorcycles, hydraulic hybrids, and energy efficient mass transit.

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