

## UPDATE TO THE BOARD REGARDING BUS FIRE

It was a month ago about this time, on February 10th, also a board meeting night that we learned a TUSD school bus caught fire near downtown. The driver of Bus 600 immediately called Central Transportation dispatch to report smoke and possible fire coming from the overhead air conditioning unit in his bus. The driver was on his way to Safford K-8 Magnet School to transport students home from after school activities. He contacted the Central dispatch and safely evacuated himself from the bus. There were no students on board.

After the fire was put out, the bus was inspected by the Tucson Fire Department and towed back to the storage lot on Campbell at 15th. The bus is a Thomas HDX, type D, and just five years old.

The next day, February 11th, Transportation department supervisors and mechanics take a look at the bus and an unburned bus to consider possible causes of the fire. Preliminary review suggested that the fire may have been electrical in nature.

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, Risk Management called our property and liability carrier, the Arizona School District Self-Insurance Trust regarding the loss and asked for technical expertise regarding the follow-up investigation. The Trust arranged for a fire inspector to examine Bus 600. The inspector, Consulting Engineer Pat Donahue, is an expert in these kinds of fires. Based in Maricopa County, Mr. Donahue works regionally and was handling an investigation in Utah at the time of our incident. Accordingly, the inspection was scheduled for February 19<sup>th</sup>. The bus was stored and untouched, pending this examination.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Donahue's investigation started. It is still in progress. On his first trip to Tucson, he performed a visual inspection of Bus 600 and, for comparison purposes, a fully intact bus of the same series. He also interviewed the driver, fleet manager and maintenance personnel.

Mr. Donahue then indicated that to determine the cause of the fire, he would need to conduct a "destructive inspection," i.e., an inspection involving the careful dismantling of parts of the bus in an effort to determine the cause. Because the outcome of that inspection could result in claims against any one of several entities that either sold or performed work on Bus 600, the Trust recommends that various vendors and contractors be notified and given an opportunity to observe any destructive inspection. Some of the parties needed to come from as far away as Chicago, New York, Dallas and Indianapolis.

The "destructive" inspection was originally scheduled for March 4<sup>th</sup>, but it was rescheduled because one of the interested parties was not able to send its expert that day. Today, March 10<sup>th</sup>, one month after the fire, the destructive inspection was conducted. Once the District and its property insurer are advised regarding the cause of the fire, we will be able to make decisions about returning other Thomas HDX, type D, buses to service as well as consult with counsel and our insurer regarding any possible claims associated with the loss of the bus and any recommendations from the inspector.

We recognize that everyone wanted immediate answers regarding the cause of the fire on Bus 600. However, we have worked carefully under the guidance of our carrier to proceed “by the book.” Because the inspector’s findings may involve broader issues related to manufacture and installation, which could have ramifications both for other TUSD buses and for the fleets of other districts, the inspection and investigation needed to be conducted under very specific protocols. With the completion of today’s inspection, we hope to quickly have information and a plan going forward.