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Contact: Sharon Wilke 617.495.9858
sharon_wilke@harvard.edu

Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center Announces 2009 Roy Family Environmental Award

Mexico City Metrobus System reduces air pollution, improves urban mobility

CAMBRIDGE, MA— The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University announced today that the 2009 Roy Family Award for Environmental Partnership will be given to the Mexico City Metrobus, a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that reduces air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while improving the quality of life and transportation options in one of the largest cities in the world.

The award – presented bi-annually to celebrate an outstanding public-private partnership project that enhances environmental quality through the use of novel and creative approaches – will be presented to the recipients at a Harvard Kennedy School event later this fall. The purpose of the Roy Family Award is to draw attention to an exceptional partnership and its achievements while inspiring others to replicate or expand upon its success.

The Metrobus system is a result of a partnership launched by EMBARQ – The World Resources Institute Center for Sustainable Transport – with assistance from CEIBA (a Mexican NGO) and the Mexico City government and with funding and support from the Shell Foundation, Caterpillar Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, and the World Bank. Through this collaboration, EMBARQ, CEIBA and Mexico City established the Center for Sustainable Transport in Mexico, the not-for-profit organization that has provided ongoing technical assistance to the Metrobus system from its inception through its expansion.

After several years of planning and development, Metrobus opened in 2005 along 20 kilometers of the central transport artery in Mexico City, Insurgentes Avenue. In 2008, the route was extended an additional nine kilometers. At the end of that year, Metrobus extended its network by launching the Eje 4 Sur corridor, which added 22 kilometers to the system.

By introducing cleaner, more efficient buses, and convincing many commuters to leave their cars at home, Metrobus has reduced carbon dioxide emissions from Mexico City traffic by an estimated 80,000 tons a year. The new buses, which operate on clean-burning ultra low sulfur diesel fuel, make more than 450,000 trips per day.

Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard has applauded the Metrobus system, saying he wants to extend the system to 10 bus lines. "If we make it greener," he said of his city, which is known for its extreme pollution, "the city will be able to survive."

EMBARQ and CTS-México also are now advising other cities in Mexico on how to develop their own BRT systems. The organizations provided technical and financial support to help launch Guadalajara's Macrobus, which opened in March with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Mexican President Felipe Calderón (MPA 2000).

“This model is transferable to cities throughout the developing world – cities that are wrestling with the dual problem of moving people around in a highly congested area, while combating very high pollution levels**,”** said Henry Lee, director of the Environment and Natural Resources program at Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, in announcing the 2009 award winner.

The partnership was selected from a group of highly qualified nominated projects from around the world that tackled tough environmental problems ranging from clean fuel adoption to nuclear waste clean-up. More than 20 experts both inside and outside of Harvard reviewed the nominees.

Reviewers praised the Metrobus project’s innovative partnership with the owners of small, polluting mini-buses that once traveled on the Metrobus route. After a year of negotiating with around 350 mini-bus owners, Metrobus created a consortium of public-private owners that includes the former mini-bus owners and operators. Due to the expansion of the system, a total of 839 polluting mini-buses have been permanently removed from the roads.

“Given the fact that most of the world’s population growth over the coming decades will be in cities, this initiative is addressing a critical and increasingly important issue – the livability and ecological sustainability of these cities,” noted Vanessa Timmer, director of One Earth, a reviewer of the Roy Award submissions.

The Roy Family has been a long-time supporter of the development of public-private partnerships to meet social goals. The Roy Family Award attempts to provide positive incentives for companies and organizations worldwide to push the boundaries of creativity and take risks that result in significant changes that benefit the environment.

The 2007 Award recognized the Hybrid Systems for Rural Electrification in Africa (HRSEA), a public-private partnership between Energiebau Solarstromsysteme, a German solar technology provider with international expertise, and InWEnt-Capacity Building International, Germany, a non-profit organization. HRSEA provides reliable, renewable electricity to rural African villages through a system of solar panel technology combined with modified diesel motors running on pure plant oil from the jatropha nut.

The first award, presented in March 2003, recognized efforts to design and implement the Noel Kempff Mercado Climate Action Plan in Bolivia. Noel Kempff Mercado is one of the largest carbon sequestration projects in the world. Carbon sequestration is the absorption of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere associated with global warming. Partners in this project included the American Electric Power Company, Pacific Corp and British Petroleum, Fundacion Amigos de la Naturaleza, the Nature Conservancy, and the government of Bolivia.

Partners and Sponsors of Metrobus Project
World Resources Institute
EMBARQ – The World Resources Institute Center for Sustainable Transport
Center for Sustainable Transport in Mexico
CEIBA
Shell Foundation
Caterpillar Foundation
The World Bank
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

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