

Chattanooga: Shuttle to link BlueCross, city

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By:

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BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, readying for the big move to its new home office on Cameron Hill next year, has bought a hybrid electric shuttle bus to help maintain links to the central city.

“It could make 55 to 60 trips a day,” said Mary Thompson, the insurer’s media relations manager.



Staff Photo by Angela Lewis

A bus taking employees a tour drives through the BlueCross BlueShield work site on Cameron Hill on Wednesday.

Workers who want to go into the central city for lunch or for other reasons will be able to ride the Hybrid Citibus and connect to the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority’s downtown shuttle, Ms. Thompson said.

The bus, which seats 19 people and costs about \$200,000, also will haul people at BlueCross’ Gateway building at the bottom of Cameron Hill to and from the new \$299 million headquarters.

While people can walk the short distance for meetings or other needs, the shuttle bus is an option, said Scott Wilson, the insurer’s public affairs manager.

“It’s all about making connections,” he said about the vehicle that’s expected to run from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Mr. Wilson said BlueCross may buy a second bus if there’s a need.

Jim Frierson, who directs the Chattanooga-based Advanced Transportation Technology Institute, said BlueCross is showing national leadership as it’s the first private company to buy the vehicle with the drive train made by Massachusetts-based Azure Dynamics.

What's ahead

The company's hybrid electric bus is to be delivered by Nov. 1, with the vehicle to go into service in January when the first BlueCross workers start the move to Cameron Hill

"It is clear leadership on its part," he said.

CARTA had been considered for shuttle service as officials said they would not create an isolated fortress on Cameron Hill as the insurer consolidates most of its Chattanooga operations to the site.

"The bus will be a major part of our transportation needs up and down the hill," she said.

Mr. Frierson said the hybrid bus will go places CARTA's downtown shuttle does not. It also has better range and capacity than CARTA's all-electric vehicles, he said.

Andy Rubin of seller Mid-South Bus Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn., said the bus can go 350 miles on a tank of gas. In addition, the bus doesn't have to be recharged at night, he said.

Mr. Rubin said other Hybrid Citibuses have been sold to public institutions such as the U.S. Air Force, the National Zoo and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Ms. Thompson said the purchase supports the insurer's goal of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for the new campus.