



[Smoke bellowed from a MAX Dart shuttle bus during lunchtime](#) in downtown Birmingham today, leading some to turn to Twitter ([like this person](#)) to find out what was happening. [The fire](#) is leading [some](#) to make snarky comments and varying opinions offered about the future of the region's transit authority, MAX, otherwise known as [the BJCTA](#).

It's not the first time it's happened here in town ([like this instance in 2010](#)) and there are no reports of injuries at this time. It's also not as though it doesn't happen elsewhere with newer buses - like [this incident in Seattle last month](#) (video).

[The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham \(RPCGB\) had just shared on January 25 news](#) the [BJCTA](#) had just signed a five-year contract with [New Flyer](#) of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, (with production facilities in the U.S.) for as many as 50 of [their Xcelsior buses](#). The contract was probably finalized before January as it was included in the bus manufacturer's press release listing firm commitments for orders this year at the beginning of the month.

The purchase was funded by [a \\$2.5 million grant BJCTA received](#) from [the Federal Clean Fuels Grant Program](#) in mid-September 2012. It was the second time the transit authority had received been awarded funds from the program, [the first time being in 2009](#) when they agreed to purchase buses from Anniston based NABI. [They received the first of those buses in 2010 according to this account from The Birmingham News](#). BJCTA has been eligible for the grants because of the region's past non-attainment status as it relates to ozone.

The 40-foot buses they've agreed to purchase have been seen occasionally driving throughout the metro area in recent months and are also in use in larger service areas like New York City (as pictured above).

The authority has been fairly quiet publicly in recent months, including a reduction of activity on [its own 4+ year old website](#). Its new director, Ann Dawson-August, has only been on the job for one month, replacing former director, Peter Behrman. He left the authority nearly a year ago this month ([joining a long list of predecessors](#)).

While we haven't heard directly from Dawson-August since her introductory press conference late last year, a review of [a piece she wrote for Mass Transit Magazine in December 2008 about relations between an agency executive and the board](#) and [an interview conducted with her a little more than a year earlier](#) should give you a better understanding of her style - and why we may not hear from her nearly as often as her predecessors.

Photo: *courtesy of New Flyer.*