

WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL

Today's Subject:

Clean Air

The news about diesel emissions and their effects on health isn't getting any better—environmental groups are suing to stop the use of diesel-fueled school buses. School bus manufacturers are being sued to post diesel fuel warning signs. States have mandated pollution controls on diesel school buses but find red tape and lack of equipment are slowing down the retrofits.

However, there is good news about school buses from Blue Bird Corp. (Fort Valley, Ga.) that a number of school district fleet managers and propane marketers are excited about. The manufacturer is now taking orders for its clean, propane-fueled school bus, which is part of its new, state-of-the-art Vision bus line. And even more exciting about the new option is that it meets 2007 and 2010 federal bus emission requirements.

This summer the company ramped up its marketing efforts to promote the propane bus and Vision line. Earlier this spring, a demonstration model of

the bus was taken to several propane industry and alternative-fueled vehicle events and to Washington, D.C., where it was on display on Capitol Hill as part of the National School Transportation Association's spring board meeting. And, at press time, marketing materials, bus specs, and propane fuel safety information were being readied for distribution to Blue Bird distributors and their customers.

At least one Texas school district, Northside Independent School District (San Antonio), had finalized an order for the propane-fueled buses as of press time and additional orders were under discussion.

Vision to Reality

"The vision has become a Vision reality," enthused Ronald W. Smith, Blue Bird Corp. director of marketing, in a nod to the partnership between his company and the propane industry in launching the Vision bus project. "There was certainly a lot of interest received at

the School Transportation News (STN) show, and we are excited for its future. Blue Bird has always been known as the premier supplier of school buses. We are celebrating Blue Bird's 80-year anniversary, and remain committed to manufacturing safety, durability, innovation, and customer choice into each bus we manufacture. The propane-powered Vision bus is a witness of this commitment and expands our alternative fuel offering to better meet the needs of our customers."

The new propane option isn't the only feature of the Vision line that Blue Bird is excited about. It is promoting a number of new features that set the bus apart from others—a more angled hood design with improved driver sight lines in front, and the fact that it is the only bus in its category built on a chassis specifically designed for a conventional bus.

In addition to showing off its new Vision bus line and generating interest in the propane model at the late-July

STN School Bus Expo, Conference & Trade Show in Reno, Nev., Blue Bird's marketing efforts shifted into high gear this month with a bus road tour of four Texas cities and a visit with members of the Texas Association of School Boards. Another demo bus was being sent to California for a similar road show.

Jen Paschke, senior advertising and communications specialist at Blue Bird, said orders are being taken for the Vision school bus and that potential customers are being provided with literature and apprised of the bus's availability. She noted that Blue Bird Corp. has dealerships in every U.S. state and Canadian province. "The first two ride-and-drive demonstrations are scheduled for Texas and California, and we will be scheduling others as notice of events and orders are received," Ms. Paschke said.

She pointed out that because virtually every state and numerous other jurisdictions across the country have their own unique set of specifications for school buses, each Vision that rolls off the line will have to be custom-built for the customer.

School Bus Leader

Don Paull, president of Capital Bus Sales and Service of Texas inc. (Leander), confirmed his company in late July sold 16 propane Vision buses to the Northside Independent School District, a longtime propane fleet customer. All are 71-passenger units. The district transports about 37,000 elementary, middle, and high school students daily and has a fleet of 590 buses. Of that total, 106 (18%) are dedicated propane fuel models while another 237 (40%) have bi-fuel gasoline/propane systems.

Northside fleet managers have favored using clean propane in district vehicles for several years as have several other Texas school districts. Dallas County Schools operates at least 500 propane school buses within its fleet, considered one of the state's largest. According to one estimate, Texas has about 14,000 propane-fueled vehicles; about 2000 are school buses and other transit vehicles.

Because of the state's large number of propane-fueled vehicles and school districts with propane school buses, the



Clean School Bus Funding Opportunities And Tax Incentives *

Federal

2007 Clean School Bus funding programs have \$7 million for projects that retrofit or replace older diesel buses. The money is funded through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) regional network; details are on EPA's Clean School Bus website, www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus. Additional possible federal grant programs can be found on PERC's website, www.propanecouncil.org.

Tax credits for new dedicated alternative-fueled vehicles (50% of the incremental cost plus an additional 30% if the vehicle meets strictest emission standards) and refueling equipment and infrastructure (30% of the cost up to \$30,000) and a volumetric excise tax credit (50 cents per gallon for propane Oct. 1, 2006 to Sept. 30, 2009) for alternative fuels are available through the 2005 Energy Bill. Details can be found on the National Propane Gas Association website, www.npga.org, and from the Propane Education & Research Council, which provided this information.

State

California	Carl Moyer Clean Engine Incentive Program www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/moyer/moyer.htm
New York	N.Y. State Energy Research and Development Authority www.nyserda.org
Oregon	Oregon Non-Point Source Pollution Control Facilities Tax Credit www.deq.state.or.us/msd/taxcredits/txcp.htm
Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection www.depweb.state.pa.us/dep/site/default.asp (search AFIG and Energy Harvest)
Texas	Texas Emission Reduction Plan (TERP) www.tceq.state.tx.us/implementation/air/terp Dallas Adopt-a-School Bus www.seco.cpa.state.tx.us/tp_bus-adopt.htm
West Virginia	Alternative Fuel School Bus Incentive

Additional state information may be found in the Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy, www.dsireusa.org, from state energy offices, and from the federal Department of Energy, www.eere.energy.gov/state_energy_program

Clean Cities Coalitions programs can be found at www.eere.energy.gov/cleancities. Tips for writing a school bus application can be found at www.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/pdfs/bustutor04.pdf.

* Other funding and tax credit programs may be available.

PROPANE BUS PRIMER



AN UNDERCARRIAGE



A FUELING STATION



A FUELING NOZZLE

Vision bus promotion was initially focusing on getting the word out in that state. Texas school district fleet managers and propane marketers have also been among the most vocal in lobbying Blue Bird and other bus manufacturers to offer a propane model again.

Paull said the demo bus will be in Houston, San Antonio, Austin, and Arlington in the Dallas-Fort Worth area Sept. 24-26 and then taken to the Texas Association of School Boards meeting. "Potential customers will finally be able to kick the tires and view the bus." The Texas tour is being sponsored by the Railroad Commission of Texas' Alternative Fuels & Research Division (AFRED) and also will feature the new Ford F-150 propane pickup truck by Roush and a propane-fueled bobtail. The tour is expected to attract from 50 to 75 fleet managers, who will have the opportunity to not only inspect and test

drive the bus but also meet with Bluebird officials. "I'm excited and encouraged at the number of folks who have shown an interest in the bus," Paull added. "It's my understanding that we'll have two units to demo in Texas, and it's great to have an actual product to show people." Blue Star Bus Sales (Lubbock) will also be taking part in the bus tour.

Hitting the Road

Texas is also one of several states that now offers grants to help fund the purchase of new cleaner buses and equipment that curb emissions.

In California, a demo bus will be hitting the road, visiting school district fleet managers and managers at air quality management districts. Jim Reynolds of A-Z Bus Sales Inc. (Colton, Calif.) at press time said his company was expecting delivery of a demo bus by mid-August that will be first shown to Southern

California fleet managers and school officials in areas under the auspices of the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which has jurisdiction over eight counties in Central California.

"By the end of September we expect to be taking orders," Reynolds said. "The time-line includes the first deliveries by the end of the year and in the first quarter of next year." Reynolds noted that over the past 12 to 18 months, many A-Z Bus Sales school district customers have applied for the alternative fuel tax credits provided for in the 2005 national highway and energy bills, and he expected that process to continue now that Bluebird's Vision bus is in production.

This is the first propane school bus offered by a major U.S. manufacturer since 2002 (*BPN*, July 2006, p. 18). The project dovetailed with a growing moun-

tain of evidence that diesel emissions are much more harmful than originally thought, especially for children, and a growing interest in running buses on a fuel other than diesel.

For a number of years, getting a new propane school bus model to market has been a priority of a large number of propane industry members, who have lobbied manufacturers to offer a propane option. The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) funded a market study on the market in 2002 and found that there were numerous opportunities to promote and sell buses fueled by propane. The Vision bus represents the model and size with the greatest market potential, according to the study.

AFRED led an alliance of organizations that included PERC and equipment manufacturer CleanFUEL USA (Georgetown, Texas) to secure funding for the development and certification of the low-emission Vision bus. PERC in February 2006 approved \$859,494 to develop, test, and market a propane version of the bus.

"Blue Bird recognizes that we have a diverse base of customers whose wants and needs are constantly changing and evolving," said Jim Moberg, vice president of sales and marketing at Blue Bird Corp. "Blue Bird is committed to meeting these needs through developments such as the propane powered Vision featuring CleanFUEL USA's LPI system."

Brian Feehan, managing director of engine fuel programs for PERC, said the sale of the first 16 Vision buses to the Northside Independent School District points to the industry-sponsored bus initiative being "right on track," and that the goal of widespread commercialization of the new propane-fueled bus is now becoming a reality. "The program is no longer in its infancy," he noted. "This first order helps ensure that it continues to go on the path we expected it to go."

Feehan added that with drivers and school officials now able to drive the Vision bus, evaluate and measure its performance, and compare it to diesel versions, he is confident that the current marketing promotion to Blue Bird distributors and their customers, and word-of-mouth recommendations among school bus fleet professionals, will boost additional sales. "The future of this project will be good as long as we meet their expectations, and

KEEPING THEIR AIR CLEAN



we have no doubt that we will," he predicted. "The goal of promoting propane as a vehicle fuel is being achieved."

Blue Bird's marketing promotion to distributors this month will reportedly include a "Propane. Exceptional Energy"-labeled backpack containing fuel safety information, bus product literature, and grant and tax credit information on the federal Clean School Bus and state programs. Ads for school district and fleet manager publications were being readied with the message that every mile is a lesson in stewardship. Photos and artwork for ads, as well as a fleet calculator, were being prepared for possible delivery to distributors this month.

Blue Bird's Vision is a conventional Type C school bus that has a 47-77 passenger capacity with wheelbases ranging from 189 to 273 inches. The bus features Clean FUEL USA's Liquid Propane Injection LPI system. Engines are being delivered to Blue Bird with the LPI sys-

tem installed. No after-market work is required.

The system replaces the gasoline injectors in the General Motors 8.1-liter Vortec engine. The GM 8.1-liter engine with the LPI system by CleanFUEL received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certification of 0.5 gm of non-methane hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides (NMHC NOR) per brake-horsepower-hour, lower than EPA is requiring for 2007 engines. It also meets even tougher 2010 emission standards.

According to Blue Bird officials, the fuel system ensures lower intake valve temperatures, denser air-fuel charges, more complete combustion, lower emissions, and improved fuel economy and performance. Its range is equivalent to that of a standard diesel bus, about 300 miles. CleanFUEL USA will work with Vision bus customers to establish repair and maintenance infrastructure in their shops.

"The Vision represents a bold step forward for the school bus industry," said Greg McCalmon, Blue Bird regional sales manager. "With its angled hood offering the greatest loading and unloading zone of field of vision in its class, and optional features such as surveillance systems and GPS capability, the Vision represents the future for safe and reliable child transportation." —John Needham

Are You Working With Your Schools?

Are you a propane marketer who visits your local school to provide educational information on propane? If so, BPN would like your input for a future article. Please contact Ann Rey, arey@bpnews.com or (800) 214-4386.