



Northwest Propane's (Dallas) Rodger Hunter demonstrates how easily propane school buses can be refueled on-site, as one of several fueling options for districts purchasing Blue Bird's new ultra-low-emissions school buses.

Sales of Blue Bird Vision Propane-Fueled School Bus Ticking Upward

The sales tally for the industry-sponsored, propane-fueled Vision school bus manufactured by Blue Bird Corp. (Fort Valley, Ga.) notched higher in Texas and California at press time, spurred on by a California road show and a Texas "Breathe Easy Tour" to promote the availability of the vehicle as well as its clean-emissions compared to diesel and gasoline alternatives.

Don Paull, president of Capital Bus Sales (Leander, Texas), reported in late April his company closed the sale of 44 of the clean, "green" buses to the Denton Independent School District, a rapidly-growing district in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The district previously had 77 propane-fueled buses. Also in Texas, San Antonio's Northside Independent School District, meanwhile, was taking delivery of 12 of the 16 Blue Bird Vision buses it previously ordered. Paull added that another bus was recently ordered by the city of Pflugerville near Austin.

"There has been a lot of interest and enthusiasm on the part of school district and air quality officials alike," Paull noted, who have been turning out

in large numbers to view and test drive the bus. "Hopefully this is the point where sales, like a snowball that gets rolling, will just keep getting bigger and go faster as it rolls along," Paull noted.

Another Blue Bird distributor, A-Z Bus Sales (Colton, Calif.), reported in April it had sold 35 buses to two transportation contractors. Durham School Services (Downers Grove, Ill.) purchased 25 and Atlantic Express Transportation Group, a Staten Island, N.Y.-based company with operations nationwide, bought 10. Yet another bus, said John Roselli, A-Z's new school bus manager, was ordered by California's Pope Valley School Board. The Pope Valley Union Elementary School District operates one school in a remote part of Napa County.

These sales follow the recent purchases of 20 propane Vision buses by the Moreno Valley Unified School District in Riverside County and five by the William S. Hart Union High School District in Northern Los Angeles County's Santa Clarita Valley. Roselli said A-Z Bus Sales is actively involved in ongoing talks with several

other California school districts regarding bus purchases.

To highlight that the 2010 Environmental Protection Agency- and California Air Resources Board-certified Vision is available for purchase, demonstration buses were on the road this spring in both California and Texas so school administrators and air quality officials could have a close-up look and drive the bus. The low-emissions Blue Bird Vision is the first propane school bus offered from a major manufacturer since 2002.

Covering more than 400 miles in three days, California's "Propane Alternative Fuel Road Show" visited three California cities the week of April 13 (see article on p. 26). In early May, meanwhile, Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) chairman Michael Williams was leading a seven-city Breathe Easy Tour. Williams' tour included presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and discussion of how schools can cut fuel costs and emissions with propane-fueled school buses.

The Breathe Easy event provided information on the environmental



Drivers leapt at the chance to take the new propane school bus for a spin during RRC chairman Michael L. Williams' "Breathe Easy" tour. Drivers raved about the acceleration and the quiet running of the new bus.

advantages of the propane-powered Blue Bird Vision bus, as well as explaining the federal and state rebates that are available for purchases, fuel costs, and propane fueling solutions. Those attending were also invited to take a ride with the chairman aboard a quiet, ultra-low-emissions Vision bus. The tour made stops at Texas Education Agency service centers in Kilgore, San Antonio, Beaumont, Houston, Austin, Richardson, and Fort Worth.

As Williams noted on his blog, www.williamsfortexas.com/blog, "From Monday through Friday I hosted seven workshops with school officials extolling the ABCs of converting their bus fleets to an alternative fuel. By replacing older, pre-1990 diesel school buses with the newly-developed Blue Bird Vision propane bus, districts can reduce fuel costs by as much as \$1.50 per gallon; NO_x, CO, particulate matter, and VOC (volatile organic compound) emissions by as much as 83%-99%; reduce reliance on foreign oil; and take advantage of federal and Texas alternative fuel financial incen-

tives."

Williams said that more than 200 superintendents, transportation directors, and bus drivers representing 130 school districts attended the workshops he hosted during the tour. Accompanying Williams were Texas business officials; Paull of Capital Bus Sales; and Curtis Donaldson, president of propane fuel system manufacturer CleanFUEL USA (Georgetown, Texas).

"Incentives are available at the federal, state, and local levels that make propane...buses a common sense option for school districts," Williams said. The federal 50 cents/gal. rebate on propane motor fuel brings in about \$1500 per year per school bus, he added. A typical grant from the Railroad Commission for replacing a 15-year-old diesel bus is about \$12,000 per bus. A federal tax credit of up to \$30,000 per installation is available for propane refueling infrastructure."

For example, Joe Alvarez, assistant director of transportation for the Denton Independent School District, said he recently turned over a check for \$175,000 to district officials. The

check represented the 50 cents/gal. propane fuel rebate for the 2007 fiscal year from the federal government.

The Breathe Easy Tour doubled up on an earlier effort by Williams to get the new green propane buses on the road. When Texas school superintendents opened their e-mails after spring break they found a message from the RRC chairman drawing attention to their benefits and availability. "Texas has over 1200 school districts which have a combined total of tens of thousands of buses," said Williams. "By using alternative fuel school buses, such as propane and natural gas or by retrofitting older buses with technologies that reduce emissions, Texas children can get to school and back safely, cleanly, while using less foreign oil."

There are 36,800 school buses in Texas, RRC reports, of which about 1500, or 4%, are propane-fueled. About 35 Texas districts currently operate propane school buses.

The Blue Bird Vision school bus features CleanFUEL USA's LPI (liquid propane injection) system and is powered by General Motors' 8.1-liter engine. Engines are being delivered to Blue Bird with the LPI system installed. No aftermarket work is required. The bus is a conventional Type C school bus with a 300-mile range. It has a 44-77 passenger capacity. Wheelbases range from 189 to 273 inches. CleanFUEL USA is working with Vision bus customers to establish repair and maintenance infrastructure in their shops, as well as arranging fueling capabilities.

Brian Feehan, vice president of the Propane Education & Research Council, said eight demonstration buses will be moving throughout the country in the coming months in order to introduce school and air quality officials to the clean-burning benefits and the tax incentives and rebates currently available for the propane-fueled Blue Bird Vision.

—John Needham