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Today's Trucking

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We're betting our hat you can't guess where this place is.



The Price of Gas These Days

The wildly expensive CNG/LNG truck is miles and miles outside the financial ability of any normal for-hire or private fleet. So why are some truckers tanking up?

BY ROLF LOCKWOOD

Natural gas is steadily gaining more adherents, even though—in Canada—subsidies are few and far between to help with the huge capital cost involved in buying NG trucks. And that's not to mention the fact that truck-fuelling infrastructure is almost non-existent.

But not completely. A Quebec project and another in B.C.'s lower mainland are about to change things. These two are the only provinces actively supporting the construction of such LNG filling stations, but there are already more than 100 in the U.S.

Canada's first liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuelling station opened recently in



Boucherville, on Montreal's south shore, where Robert Transport, Gaz Metro Transportation Solutions, and a slew of politicians came together to cut the celebratory ribbon. Robert is planning to have 180 LNG tractors on the road when the initial project is done.

Just a little later, FortisBC opened an LNG fuelling facility in Abbotsford to supply the gas to Vedder Transport. As with the Quebec project, the two companies worked together to construct the station.

Vedder Transport will now be able to refuel its new fleet of 50 LNG-powered trucks on their own premises at rates regulated by the British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC). Delivery of Vedder Transport's first LNG-fuelled Peterbilts has already begun and by the time you read this, 22 of them will be in service. All 50 are expected to arrive by early 2012.

Both the Robert tractors and those run by Vedder use engines developed by Westport Innovations.



PUMPED-UP RIGS: Vedder Transport now has an LNG fuelling facility in Abbotsford, BC. It has 22 of these Peterbilt 386 LNG rigs running now, will reach 50 soon.



ROBERT'S RULES: Robert Transport and Gaz Metro Transportation Solutions recently combined to open an LNG fuelling station in Montreal. Robert will soon have 180 LNG tractors on the road.

THE BLUE ROAD

As part of a C\$5.4-million demonstration project called the "Blue Road," the Boucherville LNG station is the first of several that are planned to open along the 800-km corridor between Quebec City and the Toronto area. The next one will open in Mississauga, ON, just west of Toronto, and a third in Quebec City, two hours east of Montreal. There are nearly 50,000 truck trips along that route each week.

The Blue Road project is based on the Quebec government's incentives for heavy-duty trucks running on natural gas. It established a \$1.8-million grant to set up the infrastructure needed to develop LNG technology and has offered significant tax incentives for the purchase of trucks.

At the centre of all this is Claude Robert, president and CEO of Robert Transport, the seventh largest for-hire fleet in Canada with a vehicle count of about 4,500. Almost exactly a year ago

FOR MORE INFO

Transport Groupe Robert
www.robert.ca

Gaz Metro
www.gazmetro.com/index-en.html

Vedder Transport
www.vtlg.com

FortisBC
www.fortisbc.com

Peterbilt
www.peterbilt.com

Westport Innovations
www.westport.com

SmartWay
www.epa.gov/smartwaylogistics

Canadian Trucking Alliance
www.cantruck.com

he and Peterbilt announced his purchase of 180 LNG trucks, mostly model 386 (his latest is pictured here). They'll be used on routes between Montréal and Québec City, and Montréal to Toronto, though not all of those trucks have yet been delivered.

"This is a win-win for both the environment and our company," Robert said at the time. "Our goal is to find alternatives to diesel and to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 20 to 25 percent."

HOMEGROWN GAS

The estimate for Vedder's GHG emissions drop is 27 percent compared to diesel, according to FortisBC, and the fleet will be using LNG from right in BC. So Vedder is not just helping create a new market for natural gas but also helping the province's economy and its climate action plans.

"At Vedder, we're committed to protecting the environment for future generations," says Fred Zweep, president of the Vedder Transportation Group. "Adding natural gas trucks to our fleet will help us reduce transportation-related emissions, ultimately improving air quality while reducing fuel management expenses."

The company specializes in the transportation of food-grade products in a bulk liquid or dry state and offers truckload and LTL services across the continent. The new trucks, subsidized by small grants from FortisBC, will be used on routes within southern BC.

PERFECT ALTERNATIVE?

Natural gas is not the answer to all our transport-fuel needs, not least because government help will be needed if it's to become a major player. Forgetting the infrastructure challenge, there's the simple cost issue. The wildly expensive CNG/LNG truck is miles and miles outside the financial ability of any normal for-hire or private fleet unless there's significant access to public coffers.

This point was clearly made a year ago when a report was released by the Canadian federal department of Natural Resources, entitled 'Natural Gas Use in Transportation'. The report acknowledges the cost issue, as the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) had been—and still is—urging governments to understand.

"The current premium for an LNG tractor is in the neighbourhood of up to 100 percent or even greater over that of a conventional unit," said CTA chief David Bradley at the time. "LNG has the potential to serve as an important niche in the trucking marketplace. It won't be suitable for every type of operation... But as part of a broad, comprehensive strategy for reducing GHG emissions from trucking, it definitely has a role to play. It is certainly of more potential benefit than biodiesel, for example."

Among the recommendations: fiscal measures to reduce the upfront and ongoing capital risk for investing in LNG.

"We'd much rather that the federal government focused on these real solutions than trying to push things like biodiesel down the industry's throat," said Bradley.

The benefits of natural gas are nonetheless real, led by lower CO₂ (carbon dioxide), NO_x (oxides of nitrogen), and green-

house gas emissions. It presently costs less too, in the range of 25 to 40-percent less than diesel. Proponents also claim lower maintenance costs because natural gas burns cleaner so engine parts stay cleaner.

And while it means more in the U.S. where 'energy security' is a much bigger issue than it is here, the abundance of natural gas in Canada is no small deal.

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