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Topeka Takes Delivery of First Propane School Bus in Kansas

Topeka USD 501 will take delivery of the first propane school bus in Kansas today (November 13, 2009). With increased emission standards and tighter school budgets a propane school bus can save a district as much as \$1,400 a year in annual fuel costs; and, for the first time, the purchase entry point between a propane powered bus and a 2010 emission compliant diesel engine is less than \$2,000.

The 77-passenger bus initially cost Topeka USD 501 more than if the district had opted to purchase a conventional diesel powered school bus. But over the expected 20-year life of the school bus, Topeka USD 501 can expect to save a whopping \$28,000 in fuel costs due to a 50 cents/gallon Federal Excise Tax Credit.

The purchase entry points between the propane powered and diesel powered bus are closing. A 77-passenger bus with a 2010 diesel emission compliant engine would cost virtually the same today as a propane school bus, according to Brian Linnens, sales manager, Kansas Truck Equipment Company. Stringent 2010 emission standards have added approximately \$8000 to the initial cost of a diesel school bus.

According to Linnens, Kansas school transportation directors have two major reservations concerning the propane bus: the availability of propane fuel and re-fueling stations; and, the uncertainty of propane engine maintenance.

"The propane distribution system in Kansas is much better than it was even a year ago. Most major truck stops have propane refueling stations which are open 24/7," said Linnens. "In addition, almost any supplier which services agriculture and recreation vehicles has propane." Linnens added that propane suppliers are aware of the school opportunity and are willing to set up propane tanks on lease arrangements for the districts at almost no cost.

Jason Jackson, shop foreman, Kansas Truck Equipment Company, said he thinks many school bus mechanics are wary of the unknown. "They don't have as much or any experience with the propane fuel system. In my opinion, what they'll find with this injection style propane fuel system is virtually maintenance free. Maintenance intervals of the engine will be the same for a propane engine as a diesel engine."

Linnens said one of the big advantages to Kansas school districts is the savings they'll experience in fuel costs. Districts are eligible for 50 cents per gallon federal tax credit with propane which makes the net cost of propane about \$1.21/gallon for propane vs. \$2.75/gallon for diesel. (November 11, 2009 pricing)

A comparison of diesel to propane is as follows:

Potential fuel savings with Federal Excise Tax Credit		
Factor	Diesel 1.35	Vision LPI: .90
Fuel/MPG	9.9 MPG	6.6 MPG
Annual Mileage	15,000	15,000
Gallons Used	1,515	2,273
Price/Gallon	2.75	1.71
Annual Cost	\$4166.25	\$3886.83
Federal Excise Tax Credit of .50/gal		\$1136.50
Net Annual Fuel Cost	\$4166.25	\$2750.33
Annual Advantage Propane		\$1136.50
Annual cost per mile driven	\$0.28	\$0.18
20 year bus life	\$83,325	\$55,000
Advantage Propane		\$28,325

Kansas Truck Equipment Company has been in business in Wichita for 50 years; a Blue Bird distributor for the state of Kansas for 47 years.

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Maurice Linnens, president

Brian Linnens, school bus sales

Talking Points

- Topeka USD 501 Propane Powered Blue Bird Vision available for inspection at Kansas Truck Equipment Company through Monday, November 9, 2009.
- The Denton Independent School District (Denton, TX) operates 139 school buses; 52% are propane fueled: 44 are the new blue Bird propane powered Visions purchased September 2008. They reported an annual fuel and maintenance savings of \$692,900 in 2009 due to the use of propane.
- Safety features of Propane
 - Lowest flammability range of any fossil fuel
 - Fitted with safety devices and shut-off valves that function automatically should the fuel line rupture
 - Propane tanks, constructed from carbon steel and located between frame rails for added protection. 20 times more puncture resistant than conventional fuel tanks
- Efficiency
 - Fully integrated system, designed in complete harmony with the OEM Engine (GM 8.1L) to ensure maximum efficiency
 - Delivers propane to the engine in a liquid form (as compared to vapor systems of the past) resulting in lower intake valve temperatures and denser air-fuel charges
 - More complete combustion
- Performance
 - Produces 325 hp @ 4000 rpm; Torque of 450 lb. ft @ 2800 rpm
 - Most drivers report that Propane-Powered Vision exceeds performance expectations in terms of steep hill climbs, cold starts, passing gear, and quiet ride
- Historical use of Propane
 - Used as a commercial motor fuel for more than 80 years
 - More than 190,000 propane-powered vehicles in use in the United States; approximately 60,000 propane vehicles operating in Canada