

## Wentzville planning natural gas refueling station

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Municipalities and private companies are increasingly eyeing the savings created by converting their vehicle fleets to run on compressed natural gas, and the city of Wentzville is opting to help reduce the barrier to fleet conversion by building a natural gas refueling station.

While Wentzville and nearby municipalities don't yet have fleets that run on compressed natural gas, rising fuel costs and the green movement make it a project the city wants to pursue, City Administrator Dianna Wright said. The city is still deciding on a final location, she said, but it is pursuing land at the intersection of Highway 40 and Interstate 70, she said. She did not have an estimate for the station's opening.

Wentzville's discussions about building the station began about five years ago, when General Motors started talking about building commercial vans, which are assembled at the Wentzville assembly plant, that ran on compressed natural gas, or CNG.

GM officially announced last month it would begin offering CNG-powered vans in September, though the CNG conversion work will not be done in Wentzville.

Other companies are moving toward CNG fleets as well. In March 2009, AT&T, whose fleet operations are based in St. Louis, announced it would spend nearly \$350 million to purchase 8,000 CNG vehicles over the next five years.

Wright said the intersection of Interstate 70 and Highway 40 offered an opportunity to be a refueling point for out-of-town CNG vehicles.

"That certainly makes an opportunity for those traveling across country," she said. "We are at the crossroads of the nation."

Right now, the only publicly available natural gas refueling station is at the Laclede Gas facility in Shrewsbury. Some consumer vehicles that run on natural gas also use the station, said Tom Schultz, Laclede's manager of utilization engineering. But the bulk of the station's users are fleet vehicles — transit buses made in Minnesota and refuse haulers made in Canada — on their way from the factory to end users, he said.

The natural gas equivalent of a gallon of gasoline sells for around \$1.60, according to Laclede's website, and in the last year, while gasoline prices have started rising again, natural gas is back down to the same level it was 10 years ago, according to data from Bloomberg.

Kevin Herdler, executive director of St. Louis Regional Clean Cities, said the savings for a city with hundreds of vehicles can be significant, but the upfront cost of building a refueling station

— around \$250,000 — is often cost-prohibitive. With Wentzville investing in an additional station in the area, he hopes he can persuade municipalities in St. Charles County to see the benefit of switching their fleets over.

"Yes it's a capital expenditure, but with (natural gas) costs so low, it doesn't take long to repay the cost of a vehicle," Herdler said.