

Gas & dual fueled vehicle fleet management computer system

Clean, with less servicing and with acceptable paybacks. That's the verdict on compressed natural gas vehicles after two years at the London Borough of Merton. The payback averages 1.6 to 3 years and in addition, greatly improved environments are being enjoyed by drivers, passengers and by residents. Sickness among Merton bus drivers, who have a seven-and-a-half hour shift, has reduced. Passengers in panel-van buses with wheel-chair tail lifts do not have to contend with diesel fumes. Meals-on-wheels drivers need to be shown how to refuel with CNG only once and refuse collection cabs are not so smelly and now quiet enough for Merton to have fitted cassette players. At six am, quiet refuse collection vehicles win the total approval of local residents, councillors and collectors.

In control at Merton's transport services is Peter Burstow. With a computerised fleet management system from Trace, he keeps tabs on the 200-vehicle fleet. That includes vehicle fuel use so his fleet management system has been modified by Trace to handle gas as well as liquid fuel. Unlike liquid fuel, gas is measured by weight (at a given pressure) and Merton currently uses a conversion to MPG for its gas powered vehicles. In future and in development with Trace, 'miles-per-kilogram' may become one of a more specialised set of gas-powered vehicle performance measures.

Merton's gas comes straight out of the ground from a BG main supply underneath its site. That minimises storage and eliminates HGV deliveries - another environmental plus. BG compresses the gas on site to 200 bar (3000 psi) into cylinders attached to a 'pump'. Drivers simply fill up with CNG at the gas pump using a Triscan key for fuel/vehicle data recording and drive off emitting clean exhaust gasses.

Merton transport services staff update their fleet management system with all of the fuel/vehicle data recorded for petrol, diesel and gas and examine the results by vehicle group with the Trace '45 Report'. This clearly shows the individual, total and average performance of similar vehicle/fuel types within a selected period. It also shows individual rogue vehicle performance in an instant. The gas-powered vehicles are the stars.

At Merton, the future is clear, where appropriate, all replacement vehicles will be either gas powered by CNG or dual-fuel with petrol/CNG. Some Merton vehicles will remain on petrol or diesel but soon they will be the exception and compressed natural gas will be the rule.