

Issues Paper “National Gas Emergency Response Protocol”

The above paper was viewed by officers of the Public Transport Authority (PTA) which is a Statutory Authority within the Department for Planning and Infrastructure of the Government of Western Australia.

The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Hon Alannah MacTiernan MLA, is committed to the use of natural gas in the Transperth bus fleet and in support of this initiative, PTA will introduce 451 gas buses to its existing fleet between now and 2011. When these additional buses are added to the existing 99 gas buses in the fleet, Transperth will have a total of 550 gas buses (53% of the fleet) operating in the Perth metropolitan area.

To accommodate this rapid expansion in the number of gas powered buses, PTA has entered into a contract with Origin Energy Retail Ltd for the supply of compressed natural gas at Morley and Bayswater depots with further installations occurring, in the very near future, at Fremantle, Southern River and the new East Perth Depots. It is envisaged that the gas facilities at Morley and Bayswater depots will be operational in December 2004 with the other depots coming on line in 2005.

All this activity means that the Transperth bus fleet, and the successful delivery of public transport services, will be increasingly dependent on natural gas as the primary fuel source. Transperth delivers bus passenger services with approximately 59 million passenger trips annually and this figure is increasing at a rate of approximately 4.8% each year. With the price of petroleum fuels increasing at an alarming rate in recent times and the prospect of the demand for liquid fuels outstripping the supply, Transperth services will be in greater demand and reliable services will be critical for commuters to travel to their place of work.

Operating the bus fleet on natural gas has huge benefits from a strategic point of view but on the other hand there is a potential vulnerability in the event of a significant gas supply disruption.

PTA is aware that the “*Gas and Electricity Safety Legislation, Amendment Bill*” is currently before Parliament and that a set of Regulations will be written once that legislation is passed, which will require the Pipeline and Network Operators to submit an Emergency Management Plan to the Director of Energy Safety for approval.

Under the strategies outlined in the “*State Liquid Fuels Shortage, Emergency Plan Volume 1*” and “*State Liquid Fuels Shortage, Operational Plan Volume 2*”, where Clause 2.5 Supporting Strategies, public transport services are listed as an “essential user” and as such fuel for these services would be unrestricted until Stage 4 (Rationing) is reached. Consistent with this approach, the PTA is seeking a similar status with respect to the use of natural gas.

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