

**The Dallas Morning News Editorial: A vital commitment to natural gas fleets
Monday, July 6, 2009**

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/editorials/stories/DN-ATT_07edi.State.Edition1.2d1aaec.html

When a company the size of AT&T says it plans to make a massive investment in compressed natural gas-powered vehicles, the rest of us need to take notice.

The Dallas-based communications giant recently promised to spend \$565 million over the next decade to buy 15,000 alternative fuel vehicles. At least \$350 million of the investment, believed to be the largest of its kind by a U.S. company, will go toward purchasing 8,000 compressed natural gas vehicles.

This effort deserves immense praise. For the sake of national security and economic prosperity, the United States needs to wean itself from imported oil. And although natural gas is also a fossil fuel, it's a step in the right direction.

Efforts such as this one by AT&T can boost a technology that has been slow to take hold in the United States. Large companies often have thousands of fleet vehicles that they replace periodically. It makes perfect sense to replace aging dirtier-burning gasoline-powered vehicles with cleaner natural gas and hybrid varieties. Each drop of gasoline that isn't burned benefits the environment and cuts the apron strings to foreign oil.

AT&T's investment is just the latest validation of ideas coming from T. Boone Pickens, the legendary oilman who has become a Pied Piper for domestic energy independence. A year ago, Pickens introduced a broad energy plan that, among other things, would convert trucks and company fleets that burn diesel and gas into vehicles running on compressed natural gas.

At the time, many dismissed him as a shrewd, self-serving businessman who stood to profit handsomely if the country adopted his plan, which also included investments in wind and solar energy. Indeed, he has invested in companies that produce natural gas, sell natural gas vehicle fuel and build wind farms.

But Pickens also has pumped millions of dollars into efforts to encourage Americans to change their energy habits and has supported federal legislation designed to shift the nation from foreign energy sources. His advocacy has been bipartisan and broad: He has buttonholed mayors, business executives and lawmakers in his crusade to change the way Americans produce and use energy.

Still, the nation lacks a comprehensive network of natural gas refilling stations or, for that matter, many natural gas-powered cars and trucks owned by private individuals. That's why it's essential that operators of commercial fleets become an aggressive part of the solution. AT&T, for example, says it will help build about 40 compressed natural gas fueling stations.

The compressed natural gas industry also could use some help from Congress, namely the extension of natural gas fuel, vehicle and infrastructure tax credits for 18 years and incentives for auto manufacturers to produce natural gas vehicles.

Pickens deserves a big share of the credit for the progress so far. His relentless advocacy for this issue is part of the reason the nation is thinking about energy in new ways.

Natural gas in D.C.

Key provisions of H.R. 1835 to encourage the use of natural gas. A Senate version is expected to be introduced this week.

--Extend for 18 years the alternative fuel credits for natural gas used as a vehicle fuel, the purchase of natural gas-fueled vehicles, and the installation of natural gas vehicle refueling property credit.

--Make all dedicated natural gas-fueled vehicles eligible for a credit equal to 80 percent of the vehicle's incremental cost.

- Make all bi-fuel/natural gas-fueled vehicles eligible for a credit equal to 50 percent of the vehicle's incremental cost.
- Allow the vehicle and infrastructure tax credits to count against the AMT provisions and make them transferable.
- Provide grants for light- and heavy-duty natural gas vehicle and engine development.