

The popularity of gas trucks is increasing along with an extending network for refuelling them, reports Chris Tindall

Supply side



CNG Fuels is opening a renewable biomethane refuelling station at Northampton as part of the UK's first large-scale study of how compressed natural gas (CNG) can help slash road transport emissions. With a refuelling capacity of more than 350 trucks per day, a new Northampton public access refuelling station will open before the end of the year at the Red Lion Truck Stop, off junction 16 of the M1, near Magna Park, Milton Keynes, one of the UK's largest distribution parks.

And rival natural gas refuelling station network Gasrec has nailed its colours to the mast with plans to more than double its footprint by the end of next year. Patrick Mocatta, Gasrec chairman, says: "There is a focus on the transport industry and in particular the heavy goods vehicle sector. We are only 4% of the vehicles on the road and responsible for 20% of harmful emissions."

Gasrec says its network of open-access and dedicated on-site CNG and LNG facilities will grow as gas vehicle sales increase. "We project the UK will need as many as 190 sites operational within a decade to meet demand," predicts Rob Wood, Gasrec chief executive officer.

It expects the natural gas-powered HGV vehicle parc above 41 tonnes to reach 5,000 trucks in the UK by 2020 and 39,000 by 2027, thanks to recent truck launches (see also p10).

Gasrec chief commercial officer James Westcott says: "The current refuelling infrastructure will continue to grow in line with sales, but it's also sufficient for most fleets' needs today.

"Our message to larger fleets which may require their own refuelling stations is to remember that it can take anywhere from three to 18 months to build an on-site facility, due to local planning requirements.

"We're keen to work with more firms to develop on-site solutions, but it's important to consult a gas provider as early in the process as possible."

EMERGENCY BACK-UP

At Northampton, two mobile CNG trailers, the first of their kind in the UK, will stand by to maintain service to the new Northampton station if an emergency cuts off its gas pipeline. They will provide a continuous back-up supply, taking turns bringing gas from the nearest operational station. The 40ft trailers each hold seven tonnes of gas in composite cylinders, enough to refuel 70 trucks. Back-up power generation will allow it to continue operating in a power cut.


The project, which has received funding from the Office for Low Emissions Vehicles (OLEV) in partnership with Innovate UK, aims to encourage UK fleet operators to switch to biomethane fuel. Performance data during the trial, due to finish in September 2019, will be analysed by Cambridge University.

CNG Fuels says it is developing a nationwide network of refuelling stations on major haulage routes, fed by the UK's gas grid and compressing gas into fuel at the point of delivery. It says that demand has nearly tripled at CNG Fuels' flagship station, in Leyland, Lancashire in the 12 months to March.

Nine dedicated CNG trucks are due to enter service at Waitrose this autumn, bringing its fleet total to 58. They will take part in the trial alongside four John Lewis CNG gas trucks. In addition, six of them will trial zero-emission electric refrigeration units powered by the CNG engine, rather than by on-board diesels.

Online delivery firm Ocado is another early adopter. It has ordered 29 new IVECO Stralis NP tractor units - the largest order for single-fuel gas-powered trucks in the UK to date. "If you don't want diesel on a heavy vehicle then the alternative is gas," explains Graham Thomas, Ocado fleet services manager.

"Things are taking shape in the market. But it's really important to look at the infrastructure and engage with potential infrastructure providers.

"We think CNG is where we need to be. The key thing is engagement with all of the stakeholders." 

FURTHER INFORMATION:

'Workshop safety: gas safe?' – <https://is.gd/ocaboh>

'Choices, choices, choices' – <https://is.gd/avezod>

Gas filling station map – <https://is.gd/oxogic>