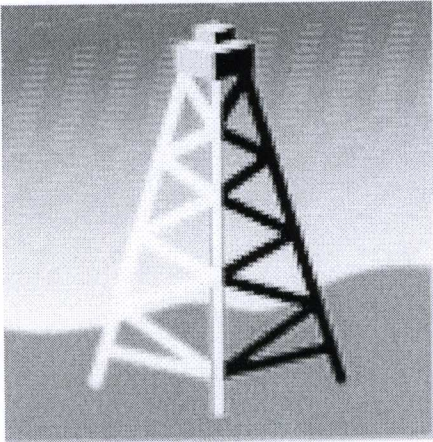


## Pa. panel approves natural project for public transit, private vehicle fueling; NEPA may benefit

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# MARCELLUS SHALE

The state plans to hire a private company to develop compressed natural gas fueling stations at public transit agencies around the commonwealth, and the public will be able to use the stations as well.

The state's Public-Private Partnership, or P3, Board Monday gave the green light to a project to find a private partner to build and operate the CNG stations at such agencies as the Luzerne County Transportation Authority and the County of Lackawanna Transit System, or COLTS.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for PennDOT and its transit-agency partners to team with the private sector to take advantage of the state's natural gas resources, save money and improve our environment," state Department of Transportation Secretary and P3 Board Chairman Barry J. Schoch stated in a PennDOT-issued news release.

The private company will design, build, finance, operate and maintain CNG filling stations at up to 37 transit facilities, PennDOT said. The state will require each fueling site to provide access to fuel for public transit and other CNG vehicles.

PennDOT also will enter into a CNG supply contract with the selected partner and into purchase agreements with each of the transit agencies. PennDOT would receive a portion of the fuel sales revenue, but the money will go back to the transit agencies to help with future capital projects.

Luzerne County transit officials have in the past discussed building a CNG fueling station and converting vans to CNG vehicles. LCTA officials could not be reached on Monday for updated information on those plans.

COLTS Executive Director Robert Fiume, who Thursday testified at a state transportation hearing in Scranton that COLTS plans to build a CNG fueling station and convert its fleet of buses and vans, said the state plan would reduce costs related to the fueling station. The agency plans to use Act 89 transportation funds to replace its vehicles.

"The expense of the design and build would be on them," Fiume said. "If we're part of this, that cost will go away for us. Also the benefit of it, the fuel could be less for us because now you have systems throughout the state buying from one company. There would be larger volume."

COLTS owns 35 buses, but 15 are diesel-electric hybrids, and about 30 gasoline- or diesel-fueled vans.

"We would diversify our fleet over time," Fiume said. "We're very excited about this."

The first step is for PennDOT to issue a Request for Qualifications to solicit interested companies. The agency expects to invite qualified teams to submit proposals early next year. A project team could be selected in summer 2015.

Gov. Tom Corbett signed the Public and Private Partnerships for Transportation Act into law in September 2012 to authorize P3 projects. This law allows PennDOT and other transportation authorities and commissions to partner with private companies to deliver, maintain and finance transportation-related projects.

According to PennDOT, Pennsylvania last year became the second-largest natural gas producing state in the nation, with the abundance of natural gas driving electric and natural gas prices down nearly 40 percent since 2008.

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