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July 23, 2009

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Workshop promotes pillar of the Pickens Plan

Natural gas could increase energy security, reduce pollution

(Birmingham, Alabama) – Compressed natural gas (CNG) offers significant advantages in terms of air quality, energy security and price. The “Pickens Plan,” set out by legendary oilman T. Boones Pickens, included natural gas as a major pillar in transforming America’s transportation sector. CNG and natural gas vehicles (NGV) are expected to play a significant role in addressing our nation’s continued dependence on foreign oil and could improve ongoing air pollution issues in the Birmingham area.

“Not only is natural gas the cleanest alternative fuel, 98 percent of the natural gas consumed in the United States is produced in North America. We can improve our air quality while simultaneously reducing our dependence on foreign oil,” said James McManus, Chairman and CEO of Energen Corporation. “As the largest distributor of natural gas in Alabama, Energen’s subsidiary, Alagasco works to promote domestically produced, clean, energy-efficient natural gas as part of the solution to our nation’s energy challenges.”

Natural gas used in vehicles reduces harmful emissions such as carbon monoxide and particulate matter by 90 percent, nitrogen oxide by 60 percent, and carbon dioxide by up to 40 percent, according to figures from the Environmental Protection Agency.

“Energy security and environmental quality are important reasons companies should consider natural gas vehicles,” said Stephe Yborra, Director of Market Analysis for the Education & Communications Clean Vehicle Education Foundation. “But economic issues, specifically as the performance of natural gas vehicles now equal or exceed that of comparable gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles, provide the financial incentive for more business to include natural gas in their transportation plans.”

The headliner for a workshop held today in Birmingham, Yborra was joined by guest speakers to present, “The Compelling Case for Natural Gas Vehicles.” The event detailed the advantages of CNG and its real-world applications. Much of the curriculum covered implementing natural gas as a transportation fuel in public and private fleets. Instructional information on CNG refueling centers, natural gas vehicles (NGV) options, securing funding, program implementation and best practices were capped by a tour of Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority’s “Max” CNG Facility.

“Natural gas works best in specific applications,” said Mark Bentley, Executive Director of the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition (ACFC). “Due to the efficiency and environmental factors, CNG used in natural gas vehicles makes perfect sense for many fleet vehicle operations, especially high mileage fleets with central fueling operations.”

CNG refueling stations are slowly gaining ground in Alabama. In 2007, ACFC and the BJCTA unveiled a public CNG station located at 8th Avenue North and 31st Street in downtown Birmingham. That station provides access for fleet and consumer users of CNG, which helps improve the range and viability of natural gas vehicles.

Attendees at today’s workshop included public officials, business leaders, fleet operators and managers, as well as interested individuals from the general public. Presenters pointed to transit buses, school buses, refuse vehicles, heavy and light trucks, utility vehicles, and passenger vans as just a few of the transportation fleet options available to run on CNG. A variety of these commercially available CNG vehicles were on display at the workshop.

The workshop was held at the Energen Plaza Conference Center in downtown Birmingham. Co-hosts for the event included the Clean Vehicle Education Foundation, Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition, Jefferson County Department of Health, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs – Energy Division, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Alabama Partners for Clean Air, Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

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The Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition, a non-profit membership based organization, is the state’s principal coordinating point for alternative fuels. The promotion of clean, renewable, domestic energy sources helps reduce our dependence on foreign oil, improves local air quality, and increases economic development opportunities in our local communities. For more information, please visit our website at www.alabamacleanfuels.org or call us directly at 205-402-2755.