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City, DTE partner with The Rapid to fuel vehicles with natural gas

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The Grand Rapids City Commission Tuesday approved an agreement between the City and the Interurban Transit Partnership (The Rapid) for the purchase of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). Under the agreement, the City will fill its CNG fleet of vehicles at The Rapid's recently completed CNG bus fueling facility, 1020 Market Avenue SW.

The fuel being dispensed from this location represents a three-way partnership between The Rapid, City and DTE Energy (DTE). The City will pump pipeline grade Renewable Natural Gas (RNG), in the form of CNG, from the Environmental Services Department's biodigester into DTE's pipeline, which will transport the RNG to The Rapid's fueling facility. Some of the RNG will come full circle in that it is produced by the City, sold to The Rapid fueling station and then purchased by the City to fuel our vehicles. The City will save money and achieve operational benefits by purchasing RNG from The Rapid fueling station. The one-year agreement sets the fuel cost at \$1.74 per Diesel Gallon Equivalent (DGE) for a total not to exceed \$150,000.

The unique environmental partnership between the City, DTE and The Rapid is possible following construction of the City's biodigester. The City decided to construct a biodigester at its Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) to accommodate the growing amount of waste being generated by the community and sent to the WRRF for processing. The biodigester is a less expensive alternative to expanding the existing WRRF. In addition, the biodigester allows the City to produce RNG, which is a valuable market commodity.

The biodigester project began initial processing of waste late last year and is now poised to begin delivery of RNG to DTE and The Rapid fueling station. In addition, RNG produced at the City's biodigester will also be used to fuel DTE-owned CNG stations within the state.

The biodigester project is designed to take the solids from the City's wastewater system as well as waste generated from large-scale food producers in town, pipes it into large tanks and "cooks" it down to much smaller, more manageable volume. RNG is created when the methane biogas – a by-product of the biodigestion process – is cleaned to utility pipeline specifications.

When a vehicle is fueled with RNG instead of conventional fuel, the vehicle's harmful nitrogen oxide and greenhouse emissions is significantly reduced. Those that use the RNG in their vehicles – in this case, the City, DTE and The Rapid – will achieve reduced greenhouse gas emissions from their fleet operations.

"This project is an excellent example of the innovative ways local governments can work with regional and commercial partners to benefit our communities," Mark Washington, Grand Rapids city manager, said. "We're able to reduce the amount of waste we're sending to disposal sites, fuel our fleet as well as other fleets with low carbon and healthier RNG, and the City is saving money on the purchase of CNG. This also will support the City's goal to reduce our carbon emissions footprint by 85% by 2030 – which is a best in class goal and includes our fleet."

Washington said the City will offset some of the biodigester's costs by selling the RNG under the federal Renewable Fuel Standard Program and earning Renewable Identification Numbers (RINs), which are credits used for compliance similar to renewable energy credits (RECs) for solar and wind. DTE will receive a small portion of the revenue for the marketing of RNG, and The Rapid will receive a small portion for acting as the RNG pathway.

“We are proud to be working on this transformative project contributing to the waste and emission reduction goals of DTE, the City and The Rapid,” Joi Harris, president of DTE Gas, said. “DTE is committed to a clean Michigan future and projects such as these play an important role in our journey toward that aspiration. This RNG will supply DTE's natural gas fueling stations as well as powering The Rapid's buses and the City's fleet vehicles. The biodigester will also contribute RNG to our voluntary customer program, Natural Gas Balance, that allows customers to offset their homes' greenhouse gas emissions.”

RNG fuel holds some of the [lowest carbon intensity of any on-road vehicle fuel](#). The Rapid will be able to utilize this fuel immediately in their fleet without the need for massive infrastructure changes or investments. The Rapid's fleet currently consists of 161 buses, 98 of which will run on RNG. Diesel buses will continue to be retired and replaced by RNG vehicles.

“This partnership is a win-win-win for The Rapid, the City of Grand Rapids, and the region,” Deb Prato, chief executive officer of The Rapid, said. “We're fueling a cleaner fleet and keeping more waste out of landfills. This innovative partnership represents the creativity and collaboration that is necessary to develop strategies across multiple sectors to create better outcomes for the climate and the community.”

The Rapid's CNG fueling facility is operational now. The partners are planning a grand opening of the City's biodigester facility at a future date. Read more about the City of Grand Rapids' biodigester [HERE](#).