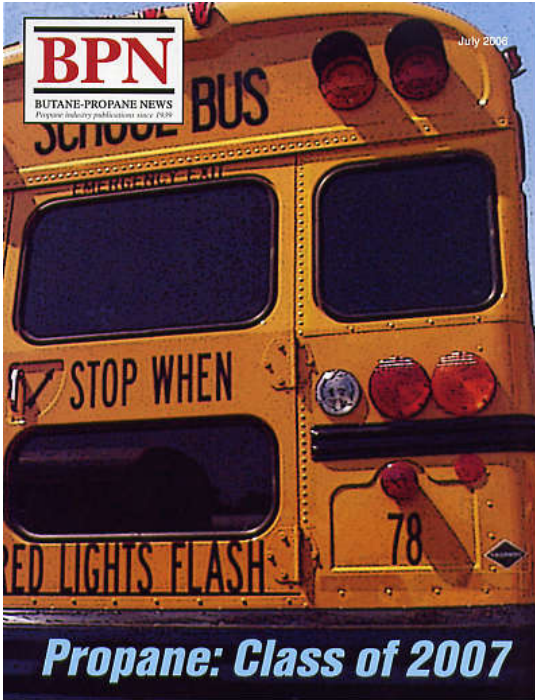


# Blue Bird School Bus Roll-Out Remains on Track

*Blue Bird's propane-fueled school bus is set to debut as Class of 2007.*



The 2007 roll-out of the first propane school bus offered in the U.S. by a major manufacturer since 2002 is on track, according to sponsors of the initiative, although at press time there had been no sales publicly announced prior to manufacture.

Blue Bird Corp. (Fort Valley, Ga.) is forging ahead with plans to begin manufacturing a propane version of its Vision school bus in November following construction of two prototypes next month and crash testing in September. Blue Bird has partnered with Powetrain Integration LLC (Detroit), a provider of original equipment manufacturer engine expertise, in the project.

At a ceremony in Dallas April 24 to announce the bus's availability, Texas Railroad commissioner Michael L. Williams commended Blue Bird's vision and dedication to the project. "I greatly appreciate Blue Bird for acknowledging the benefits of propane-fueled buses and for taking the time and effort to address this need."

In his address, he also emphasized propane buses' health and environmental benefits. "We've all heard the reports that conventional diesel school buses increase children's exposure to air pollutants – especially particulate matter," Williams said. "That's not healthy. Now there's a safer alternative. Propane buses cut emissions of soot, smoke and particulates virtually down to zero. In addition, the new buses reduce oxides of nitrogen, which contribute to smog by 60% over the new diesel buses that will be sold."

Williams noted that the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) had been awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to assist Texas school districts to purchase cleaner propane buses. The grant, through the State Energy Conservation Office, will cover up to 80% of the cost difference between a propane bus and a conventional bus.

The RRC led an alliance of organizations that included the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) and CleanFUEL USA (Georgetown, Texas) to secure funding for the development and certification of the low-emission bus. In February, PERC approved \$859,494 to develop, test, and market a propane version of Blue Bird's Vision bus.

"Our position as a school bus market leader isn't just the result of our innovations, it's also due to the comprehensive line of school buses we offer to meet the diverse and changing needs of our customer," said Jay McDuffie, Blue Bird's advertising, communication, and training manager. "Blue Bird offers a range of school bus propulsion options: compressed natural gas, diesel, and now propane, which provides school districts with an attractive array of fuel choices."

The bus will have a dedicated fuel system and a range of 300 miles. The 8.1-liter General Motors engine will meet or exceed 2010 emissions standards and generate 270hp at 3600 rpm. Powetrain Integration will also ensure the engine and chassis delivered to Blue Bird meet specifications.

The Vision features a new "purpose-built" chassis that incorporates a more angled hood design, improving driver sight lines in front of the bus. The chassis is specifically designed for a school bus, ensuring increased safety and ride comfort.

The wheelbase range for the Vision school bus is 189 to 273 in. Capacity ranges from 47 to 77 passengers. Four-wheel hydraulic, and air-brake systems are available, and anti-lock brakes on all four wheels are standard. Seats are upholstered in a fire-block material, and emergency exits include two roof hatches and four side push-out windows.

With the cost of new diesel bus engines anticipated to rise as much as \$5000 to meet 2007 emissions standards, Blue Bird said it sees propane buses as an attractive option. By 2010, the company expects to sell 2200 propane school buses, and after 2010, the manufacturer said it believes sales will double as districts face increased costs for diesel buses. By 2013, it is estimated there will be 14,200 propane school buses in operation, which will consume 425 MMgal. of propane over their useful life. – John Needham