San Diego’s Metropolitan Transit System has roots dating back to the horse-drawn trolleys used in the city in the late 1800s. Now, the public transit provider transports nearly 100 million San Diego-area residents, tourists, workers, and students annually using trolley, light rail, and bus lines.

The organization has two goals: to provide clean, efficient, public transportation while being responsible with the taxpayer dollars it uses to provide that service. Its light rail produces zero emissions. Almost the entire fleet of 625 fixed-route buses run on renewable natural gas, and energy- and water-saving features are incorporated into transit stops and stations. But until fall 2016, its 215 fixed-route mini buses and paratransit buses still relied on gasoline. When MTS leaders learned that operating those buses using propane autogas would allow the organization to reduce emissions and save money, MTS officials jumped at the chance.

REDUCING EMISSIONS

Paul Jablonski, MTS chief executive officer, said San Diego first incorporated alternative fuels into its fleets more than 20 years ago to combat air quality issues in southern California. By adding 77 propane autogas buses — 46 Ford E-450 22-foot paratransit buses and 31 Ford F-550 32-foot mini buses — in late 2016, the city reduced as much as 24,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per year for each paratransit bus, and 37,000 pounds per year for each mini bus, Jablonski said.

“Propane autogas is really phenomenal,” he said. “It’s a win-win all the way around.”

KEEPING COSTS LOW WITH PROPANE AUTOGAS

The propane autogas buses will be used to transport people with disabilities and in lower-density suburbs where a smaller bus is more cost-effective. Jablonski said MTS first began researching alternatives for the smaller fleet when gas prices began rising several years back, heavily impacting the organization’s fuel budget.

“We have to be careful,” Jablonski said. “We’re using taxpayer dollars and our mission is to put service on the street every day.”

Ron Roberts, chairman of the San Diego County board of supervisors, said when
MTS worked with San Diego’s fire marshal to install a 2,000-gallon aboveground tank and refueling station at its central facility, which allows for easy, accessible refueling. Spraul said as the fleet continues to add propane autogas vehicles, they hope to renovate an existing concrete pad used for a gasoline tank to hold a second propane autogas tank.

Training drivers and technicians to operate, refuel, and maintain was quick. Spraul said, that adding propane autogas vehicles didn’t require any changes or additions made to maintenance equipment or operations. Drivers don’t notice a difference operating the new buses up and down the hilly streets of San Diego, Spraul said. Drivers and riders alike have noted that the bus noise is considerably less on the propane autogas buses, too.

“The positive comments have been regular and consistent from the public, local leaders, riders, and drivers,” Spraul said. “And there is regular recognition of MTS’ propane autogas vehicles in reducing GHG emissions.”

EASY TRANSITION
Another advantage of propane autogas is that incorporating the fuel into the fleet has been simple, Spraul said.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION
Learn more about propane autogas vehicles and the fleets that use them at propane.com/on-road-fleets.

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