Tiger Transit getting touch of green with conversion to biodiesel fuels

Auburn’s white and blue Tiger Transit buses are now green.

The transit fleet of more than 40 vehicles has made the switch from regular diesel fuel to biodiesel, a cleaner burning alternative fuel produced from domestic, renewable resources. AU is the first university in the state to make the switch.

“Auburn’s leadership on alternative sources of energy starts on campus,” said AU President Jay Gogue. “Tiger Transit’s switch to biodiesel illustrates our commitment to improving energy security for the United States and promoting economic growth through development and use of renewable bioenergy.”

The switch comes at a time when ridership is at an all-time high – with a one-day record of more than 17,000 riders the first week of classes – and when more than 5,000 users a day are using new visualization technology to check the internet or their cell phones to see exactly when their bus will arrive.

University officials worked with Groome Transportation, contract-provider of the transit fleet, on the environmentally friendly transition.

The transit buses are initially using B10-grade biodiesel, which is a mix of 10 percent biodiesel and 90 percent diesel. However, the transit system will move to a B20-grade biodiesel blend within the next few months. The type of biodiesel used at AU is made from soybean oil.

Beyond the environment, officials said, the university’s switch also proves beneficial for economic development throughout the state as the fuel is produced by Alabama Biodiesel Corporation based in Moundville and distributed by R. K. Allen Oil Company based in Talladega.

Biodiesel is made through a chemical process in which the glycerin is separated from the fat or vegetable oil. The process leaves behind two products: methyl esters, the chemical name for biodiesel, and glycerin, a valuable byproduct usually sold for use in soaps and other products.

“The Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition congratulates Auburn University for its leadership in moving to cleaner and more environmentally friendly alternative fuel for its fleet of transit vehicles,” said Mark Bentley, the coalition’s executive director.
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“The greatest advantages of such fuel-use are it reduces our dependence on foreign oil, improves the economic development for the state by encouraging new industries and reduces pollution both in and outside the buses, in addition to the air,” Bentley explained.

Bentley said he is sure Auburn’s example in moving to alternative fuels will help efforts in the state to promote renewable fuel for use in personal vehicles as well as in business and other university fleets. While the cost of the biodiesel is similar to that of regular diesel fuel, Dave George, AU’s director of parking and transit services, said there are many advantages to using biodiesel in addition to the environmental benefits. “Biodiesel actually helps keep the inside of the engine cleaner. And passen-gers and drivers appreciate the reduction in exhaust fumes,” he said.

“There hardly any odor as compared to the smell of regular diesel fuel,” George said. “And we will get better fuel mileage with biodiesel compared to regular diesel.”

With fall semester classes under way, Tiger Transit officials are measuring fuel usage to determine how much biodiesel improves fuel mileage. George said a typical bus uses nearly two gallons of regular diesel fuel per hour.

“We’re really excited about this,” said Clarence Cobb, operations manager for Coöme Transporta.

tion. “A lot of people just do not realize how Tiger Transit is helping the city by keeping cars off the road. And now the buses will be doing that while burning cleaner fuel.”

The switch to biodiesel is the latest innovation for Tiger Transit this year: In May, the system began using GPS technology, which enables students to track the buses in motion and the routes in real time on a detailed map displayed on the Internet or a Web-enabled cellular phone. The Transit Management System has recorded more than 5,000 users who have logged on each day since the beginning of fall semester classes last week. Auburn was only the fourth university in the country to install and use the new system.

Tiger Transit operates 42 buses plus spare vehicles on 20 routes around the campus and throughout the city. The system averaged 230,000 riders a month last fall, the busiest season for the transit, and set a record this month with more than 17,000 riders in one day.

“It’s great not to have to worry about finding a parking place any more; Tiger Transit just comes right up to my apartment complex,” said Michelle England, a junior majoring in marketing. “I haven’t used the new GPS, yet, but my friends are using it and it sounds great. That — and the alternative fuel — sets a good example.”

Future Village

Site work for new construction has begun on the west side of campus. The former parking area will undergo a rapid transition in coming months as AU develops a new student housing complex, dining facility and basketball arena on the site. Scheduled for completion by fall 2009 and housing 1,680 students, The Village will introduce the “living-learning communities” concept to Auburn. As part of that concept, the residence halls will include classrooms, study spaces and offices for faculty, tutors and counselors.

Examining threat, response

Initiative to focus on climate change

The interdisciplinary AU Sustainability Initiative has begun a campuswide drive to involve faculty, staff and students in a series of events this fall and early 2008 focusing on global climate change.

The Sustainability Initiative is organizing a series of public lectures and discussions to highlight the environmental and social implications of climate change, said the initiative’s director, Lindy Biggs.

The AU activities are part of a Focus on the Nation campaign involving 1,000 education and community institutions across the United States. The fall and winter campaign will culminate on Jan. 31 in a day-long campus symposium.

“We’re looking for a few enthusiastic faculty members, staff and students to join the organizing team,” said Biggs, who is also an associate professor in the Department of History. “We’re also looking for faculty who would be willing to prepare a talk this semester that would be open to the public but geared toward their college.”

Some events will be for a general audience and others will target specific audiences but could still prove informative for all, Biggs added.

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She said the discussions in colleges and schools would address two questions: What are the implications for climate change for your college and profession? and How can your discipline address climate change?

Biggs, who teaches “History of Technology” and “Environmental History,” said numerous scientific studies and readily observable evidence show that the earth’s climate is growing warmer, with increasing evidence pointing to manmade pollution as a major factor in the temperature change.

While some still consider the topic of global climate change controversial, at this point there is overwhelming scientific consensus indicating that human-caused climate change is a reality,” she said.

Although documentary films such as “An Inconvenient Truth” brought the issue into the public arena, Biggs noted that additional studies documenting global warming were cited in a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change established by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environmental Programme in 1988. The IPCC recently cited widespread evidence of melting polar ice, rising seas and — of particular interest to Alabama in 2007 — the increasing presence and severity of heat waves in North America. Those trends are forecast to grow worse through the remainder of this century, posing major challenges for ecosystems, national economies and human health.

Invited lecturers at AU this fall will include Tom Taylor of Vertegy, a “green” building firm, and Lawrence Davenport, a Samford University expert on Agricultural Sciences who will talk about the potential consequences of climate change for Alabama. Other speakers and events will be added in coming weeks, Biggs said.

For more information or to volunteer for Focus the Nation activities at AU, contact Biggs or Projects Coordinator Matthew Williams at 844-7777 or see the Sustainability Initiative Web site, www.auburn.edu/sustainability.
Center to feature demonstrations of birds in flight

The Southeastern Raptor Center will host educational, birds-in-flight raptor programs on Fridays this fall before certain home football games.

The programs, “Football, Fans and Feathers,” are scheduled for Sept. 14 and 21, Oct. 5 and 26 and Nov. 23. Each show will begin at 11 a.m. in the 350-seat Edgar B. Carter Educational Amphitheater on Raptor Road just off Shug Jordan Parkway.

Tickets will be available at the raptor center gate for $5 each, payable only by check to the Southeastern Raptor Center. Cash cannot be accepted. Tickets are $3 a person for school groups, which should call ahead at 844-6943. Children under three years old are admitted free.

“We will free-fly a variety of birds over the crowds from our flight towers,” said Marianne Murphy, an education specialist at the Raptor Center.

Murphy and colleague Roy Crowe train Auburn’s golden eagle War Eagle VII, nicknamed Nova, and bald eagle Spirit, each of which will fly above Jordan-Hare Stadium this season. Retired golden eagle War Eagle VI, Tiger, also lives at the center.

“Guests will see birds such as hawks and falcons flying and up close,” Crowe added. “We hope to have one of the eagles there during the shows.”

In addition to hosting shows in the amphitheater, the Raptor Center educators present shows across the Southeast for schools and organizations. More information about arranging an educational program is available by calling 844-6943.

All birds used in the programs are non-releasable due to prior injuries or human imprinting.

Grant to AU supports Latin American trade

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded a two-year, $250,000 grant to faculty in two AU colleges for initiatives involving trade between Alabama and Latin America.

The project is led by Paula Bobrowski, associate dean for research and faculty development in the College of Liberal Arts, and Beverly Marshall, an associate professor of finance in the College of Business.

The first initiative, beginning this fall, is aimed at creating faculty awareness of the social, political, economic and business environments in Latin America. Some of the grant activities include trade missions to key destinations for Alabama exports, language immersion programs, faculty attendance at varying seminars and conference presentations on international trade issues.

AU Internet feature adds news updates

Auburn has added an RSS feed to its Web site so Internet users can receive news updates automatically from the university’s new Wire Eagle news site (http://wireagle.auburn.edu).

RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, makes it possible for people to keep up with several favorite Web sites quickly without having to visit each site, said Mike Clardy of the Office of Communications and Marketing.

“The Auburn RSS feed will put Auburn news headlines directly onto a person’s Web browser when they view the Internet,” said Clardy. “When we send out a news release, it will automatically go to those who have subscribed to our RSS feed, which is free of charge.”

Many news organizations have similar feeds so a person can customize a Web page to show items of interest. News headlines from several different sources, such as CNN and Fox News, are available, as are local television stations and newspapers.

“Instead of going to many different Web sites to read news, you can set up your browser or a third-party Web service to pull all the content you’re interested in into one place,” Clardy said.

Links on the AU homepage and on the Wire Eagle news page will connect Internet users to the RSS feed. Microsoft Internet Explorer 7 has an RSS reader built into the browser, so a person can click on the RSS logo and then follow directions provided by Internet Explorer. Many free Web readers are also offered by sites such as Google, Yahoo and AOL.

“Auburn employees and students can use their AU Access page to add RSS feeds,” he added.

Clardy said those who don’t know how to use RSS can subscribe to Wire Eagle’s weekly e-newsletter and have news items sent to their e-mail address.

Professor joins APT advisory board

The Alabama Public Television Authority’s educational division, known as APTPlus, recently invited the College of Education’s Susan Bannon to serve on its advisory board.

APT officials said Bannon, who is an associate professor and director of the Learning Resources Center, will bring a perspective for how APT can help pre-service educators in Alabama.

The Auburn faculty member is the only higher education professional on the board. Other advisory board members include representatives of the Alabama State Department of Education Technology Initiatives Section and several K-12 teachers.

At AU, Bannon was instrumental in implementing the APTPlus services, including United Streaming digital video, in the College of Education. The college’s Learning Resources Center assists students, faculty and staff with use of educational technology. The center’s services include graphic design, technology assistance, word processing and video/audio/multimedia production.