

CNG station approved for Harmar

MARY ANN THOMAS | Thursday, Nov. 26, 2015, 12:01 a.m.



JASON BRIDGE | TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania operations director Brian Shema poses next to the 2 newly acquired natural gas powered Honda Civics at the society's Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve in Fox Chapel on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2015. The society acquired the cars to reduce their carbon footprint and eventually become a 100% carbon neutral organization.

A new compressed natural gas station soon will come to the region, landing in Harmar.

Harmar Supervisors approved the CNG fuel station, owned by American Natural, along Rich Hill Road. The station also will offer diesel for other commercial vehicles and gasoline for passenger cars.

There are about nine public CNG pumps in the greater Pittsburgh area.

The Harmar station is the second in the Alle-Kiski valley, adding to Valley Lines Inc. in South Buffalo Township.

DEMAND FOR CNG

While fueling fleet vehicles with CNG has taken off, the movement has stalled for passenger cars.

Honda announced it would stop selling its gas-electric hybrid and CNG-powered cars earlier this year. Slow sales and falling gasoline prices prompted the move, according to the car maker.

Also, experts point to the lack of CNG stations to encourage motorists to switch to the new fuel.

The Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania, headquartered in Fox Chapel, just bought two CNG Honda civics through support from the EQT Foundation and Honda North.

The nonprofit will use the cars for employees visiting schools and community outreach throughout the region.

“A natural gas refueling station in Harmar will be very convenient for Audubon and factored into our decision when we acquired the cars,” said Jim Bonner, executive director of the local Audubon chapter.

“An all-electric vehicle was not a practical option for us, and a CNG vehicle provided a better, lower-carbon alternative to what most staff drive as their personal vehicles,” he said.

Giant Eagle, which has two public CNG fueling stations, still is committed to the new fuel, spokesman Dick Roberts said.

Currently, more than 90 CNG powered vehicles account for about 44 percent of Giant Eagle's total distribution fleet, Roberts said.

“One component of the company's overall commitment to sustainability is an increased focus on CNG fueling,” he said.

Giant Eagle opened its first public/private CNG fueling station in Crafton in 2011, then another at the GetGo in Cranberry.

HARMAR STATION

The Harmar station could break ground as early as the first of the year, according to Andrea Feinstein, executive vice president for American Natural, headquartered in Pittsburgh.

The station should be operating in the second quarter of 2016 and will employ between 15 and 18 full-time equivalent employees.

The new Harmar station will be located next to a Pitt-Ohio trucking facility, its main customer.

“We will be well positioned not only for Pitt-Ohio but will look for opportunities to grow the CNG network, whether they are part of a fleet or a retail customer,” said Feinstein.

“We're optimistic about the adoption of CNG fleet vehicles — it's a very important driver,” she said.

The new Harmar station adds to American Natural's CNG station in Station Square and another upcoming CNG station in Wexford.

The 2.1-acre site will accommodate big rigs and average consumers with plenty of room and fresh sandwiches, rotisserie chicken and pizza.

“The store has high ceiling, is modern with an environment that is inviting and equally comfortable for all customers, whether they be a mother with children or a truck driver that wants something healthier,” Feinstein said.

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