

S'pore should encourage more CNG use

By **JOYCE HOOI**

SINGAPORE needs to set about converting its vehicle population to use natural gas if it wants to speed up what Robert A Hefner III calls the "Grand Energy Transition", Mr Hefner said yesterday.

The founder and owner of natural gas firm GHK Exploration was in town for the Kings of Freedom Project at Bedok – a celebration today of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

At the end of November last year, 4,515 bi-fuel compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles were registered in Singapore, two-fifths of which were taxis.

Almost all of the 574,929 private cars here use petrol – a "liquid fuel" that "has begun its twilight years", according to Mr Hefner's book *The Grand Energy Transition*, published last year.

The book, which has sold 10,000 copies worldwide, advocates a switch from unsustainable solid to sustainable gaseous fuels like CNG and hydrogen, which are cleaner and

more efficient.

It also predicts that natural gas will increasingly displace solid and liquid fuels.

In Singapore, the growth of bi-fuel CNG cars was torpid last year – net registrations had increased a mere 229 at the end of November.

This is despite the opening last year of the \$60 million Old Toh Tuck Road refuelling station that can handle 20,000 vehicles a day.

"Governments need to begin to charge the external cost of gasoline – like the environmental and military costs of securing oil – to the consumer," Mr Hefner said yesterday.

According to studies quoted in his book, if the true cost of oil were internalised, the cost of petrol at the pump would increase by US\$3-US\$15 per gallon.

Inertia towards natural gas in Singapore continues, Mr Hefner reckons. He said that when he suggested putting in natural gas pipes, at little extra cost, to a building he visited at Marina Bay, he was told: "We don't use it."



FILE PHOTO

Mr Hefner: 'Governments need to begin to charge the external cost of gasoline – like the environmental and military costs of securing oil – to the consumer'

In the US, the transition from solid fuel like coal remains very much a bumpy one. While 55 per cent of the energy generated in Singapore comes from natural gas, 50 per cent of the US energy comes from coal, Mr Hefner said.

The grand energy transition, while inevitable, will hurt the coal industry, but he points out that this employs only 84,000 miners in the US and has "a dispro-

portionately powerful lobby for its size".

He also has a bone to pick with the cap-and-trade Bill passed in the US last year. "It's rubbish because it exempts coal. It was an easy way for politicians to go home and say they did something about energy," he said.

But an improvement may be in the offing in the middle of this year if plans for carbon taxes advance, he believes.