



Press release

CUTE: Success through team spirit

Under the motto “The Future of Transportation is Clean”, the 26 project partners in the two-year practical test project CUTE (“Clean Urban Transport for Europe”) for fuel cell buses held a closing congress in Hamburg on 10 and 11 May. Their finding: the test results are considerably better than the participants expected at the start of the project. Many challenges remain for the future, however. But the tasks in view are clearly defined.

Hamburg (eos) – A great success: CUTE, the two-year practical test of fuel cell buses. In the test, nine European cities ran 27 innovative Mercedes-Benz Citaro fuel cell buses in day-to-day local transport operations. Each of the cities established its own hydrogen infrastructure for refuelling the buses. Under the title “The Future of Transportation is Clean”, the 26 project partners have now presented the results of the field trials at a congress in Hamburg attended by more than 150 participants from 21 countries. They came not only from the companies involved in the project, but also from other interested companies, cities and public transport operators. Representatives were also sent by scientific institutes and universities, and by hydrogen and fuel cell associations.

EU promotes H2 and fuel cell technology

“CUTE has made it clear that the question must no longer be whether and how the new technology works, but when it can be competitive,” stressed Alfonso González Finat, the European Commission’s Director-General for Transport and Energy. This was a very good description of the milestone that the project represents for the use of fuel cell technology and the introduction of hydrogen as a source of energy. “CUTE was the most important project of this kind worldwide. The partners received European financial assistance totalling 18.5 million euros.” An investment which underlines the Commission’s commitment to hydrogen and fuel cells as an environmentally friendly transport technology for the future.

Test paves the way for further development

The EU considers the money to be a good investment. The other partners – cities, public transport companies, infrastructure operators and the vehicle manufacturer – also invested large sums in the practical test. The total cost added up to 78 million euros. But this expenditure is worthwhile from many points of view. “We have accumulated a wealth of valuable findings that indicate where we need to make improvements and how we can go about them,” says Prof. Herbert Kohler, Vice President Research Body and Powertrain and Environmental Officer at DaimlerChrysler. This is the experience of all the companies involved in the project. What this means in practical terms for the bus manufacturer is: “We need greater efficiency, i.e. longer life, reduced fuel consumption and a lower price per vehicle.” The designers and developers already have clear ideas about how to achieve this. “We will build a new generation of fuel cell buses that are more powerful than the present ones. Also,” Kohler announces, “We intend to use a high-performance battery into which we can feed energy recovered from the braking process. This will save fuel. The fuel cells will only have to meet the normal level of energy requirements. Peak demand will be met by the battery. This will save both volume and weight.”

Investment in a future worth living

Günter Elste, CEO of Hamburger Hochbahn, believes this commitment to fuel cell technology makes sense from the point of view of a public transport company: “Prices are still a long way from being able to compete with those of conventional diesel buses. But remember: Mrs. Benz bought the petrol she needed for the first car at great expense from her pharmacy. Initially this is not the crucial consideration. We need an alternative to fossil fuels. These are not only finite, but cause irresponsible damage to our environment at the same time.” That is why Elste – with the full backing of the city government, which aims to develop Hamburg into the most important hydrogen and fuel cell city in Europe – has gone for zero-emission fuel cell buses that run on hydrogen produced using only “green” electricity. In addition to the three existing buses he recently bought up the test vehicles from Stuttgart and Stockholm, thereby increasing his fleet to nine H₂-fuel cell buses. The

people of Hamburg, says Elste, are delighted and proudly take visitors for a trip on the No. 6 fuel cell buses to the Hafen-City port redevelopment area.

Important: public acceptance

The great public acceptance of the buses throughout Europe was a source of great pleasure for the project partners. Heinrich Klingenberg, managing director of the Hamburger Hochbahn subsidiary hySOLUTIONS, has this to say: “The buses in the CUTE fleet showed people that fuel cells could be relevant to their everyday life – a completely new experience for most people.” What they often found difficult to understand was why there were not more of these clean buses in operation. But there was still a great deal to do – with regard to both technology and costs. Anyone who took part in the congress had a chance to appreciate, even as an outsider, the great challenges that still remained to be tackled in individual areas.

Hydrogen production and refuelling: it works!

“For example, refuelling takes too long and the facilities in many cities were not sufficiently user-friendly,” said Oliver Weinmann, Manager Innovation Management at Vattenfall Europe, in his report on the experiences of the infrastructure operators. For future projects the suppliers of hydrogen and refuelling systems intend to step up their on-site support. “But the self-service era that we are familiar with for ‘normal’ filling stations will come for hydrogen refuelling systems as well,” he added.

“First of all, however, we are very happy that it worked at all and that we managed to get under control the technical problems that some sites experienced with the production of hydrogen by reforming natural gas,” says Weinmann. “We now have a basis for further work in the future.”

CUTE redefines team spirit

The work of solving the numerous major and minor problems during the two-year trial period showed the value of what has been called the “Spirit of CUTE”, which was also characteristic of the congress atmosphere: the frank and open approach to faults and problems, the constructive cooperation and free sharing of knowledge not only between countries, but also between companies that otherwise compete on the markets. Vasso Tsatsami of BP put it like this: “We know we can only manage it together – and we are glad to be part of the team!”

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You can find pictures of the congress at: www.cute-hamburg.de

Press contact:

motum -
Präsentationsdesign & Kommunikationskonzepte

Sybille Riepe
Königstr. 30
22767 Hamburg
Germany

Tel. +49. 40. 40 18 89 22
Fax +49. 40. 41 30 81 83
Mobile +49. 170. 58 70 317
riepe@motum.net
www.motum.net

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