



Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership

Bus Working Group 2005

Comments for June 2, 2005 Meeting

Recent Progress

The most important news this year is that despite the upheaval in financing, 6 Optare Solo E-Pack midi buses have been registered in the UK, while the bus operator London General (part of the Go-Ahead group) has ordered 6 Wrights hybrids derived from the Electrocitiy bus. We expect that all these vehicles should achieve Low Carbon Status.

Stagecoach are introducing battery-electric Designline vehicles (from New Zealand) in the North East of England. It is not known if Low Carbon Status has been calculated/tested on these vehicles.

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These observations should be read alongside recent minutes.

It is my belief that the LowCVP has helped create the right conditions for these hybrids to be happening at all. The development of the rather open “minus 30%” target into a specific test concept by the WG has focussed thinking.

Full specifications for the Accreditation procedure (tests, target values etc.) for defining Low Carbon status have now been delivered to the Department for Transport. These procedures cover depleting and non-depleting hybrids. The Department will now create a specific procedure.

The whole issue of the Bus Programme awaits decision at the EU. The application went into the EU on 15 March, so in principle we should know the outcome very soon on the basis of a “2 month” timetable for approval.

The Bus Market and the Target

The “official” Government target is for at least 600 Low Carbon Buses to be registered in 2012. This is nominally 20% of a market of about 3000.

It should be noted that while the market for relevant vehicles in 2003 was indeed 3042 units by 2004 the market was down to 2754. So far this year, the bus market has recovered by 3% but this is the net result of a double deck market down by 34% and a large single deck market up by 96%. These swings reflect the long term cycles of fleet replacement and the effects of London "overbuying" (by which I mean the rapid replacement of the fleet in less time than you would expect) in recent years and now slowing down.

This is basically a warning that it is very hard to be confident about the 600 target being hit because bus purchase patterns are determined by other factors at the moment. We need to raise the status of Low Carbon in these factors.

With that in mind, we do need confirmation from the new Government that this target will have some status. Ideally, the market will go Low Carbon for market force reasons such as reduced fuel consumption and lower costs of ownership (which the Bus Programme vehicles are intended to demonstrate). Without some extra boost (and I do not mean subsidy), the Bus operators could simply say "so what". If the overall fuel, technology, environmental awareness and so on change in this country, then all segments will go Low Carbon in any event. But if these "other things" do not change very much by 2012, then indeed it will be "so what".

There is only one bus authority at present that can drive matters like this namely Transport for London, who are certainly positive about Low Carbon thinking. However, market structures (vehicle availability, cascading older vehicles) mean that they could not single-handedly drive a unique Low Carbon bus business solely in London.

I am therefore still concerned with the target and its achievement in the real world.

Adrian Wickens

Chairman, Bus Working Group.