On the road to an electric future

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What is needed to smooth the path ahead for the introduction of electric road transport? Chris Hellinga at D-Incert, short for Dutch Innovation Centre for the Electrification of Road Transport, thinks he has the answer.

F042 Image 1

From its name, it is quite clear what the Dutch Innovation Centre for the Electrification of Road Transport (D-Incert) aims for. Originator Chris Hellinga believes the current barriers to electric road transport can be overcome with scientists, business people, environmental organisations and other stakeholders coming together in one place with the help of D-Incert. The centre provides a discussion platform for people with a special interest in the electric vehicle (EV) sector.

The first ever meeting was held on March 5th 2008. The last time everyone gathered together, more than fifty different organisations and companies were under the same roof, with similar goals.

Chris says the meetings act as workshops to identify gaps in knowledge and to formulate projects that will fill those gaps.

Transition has already begun

The shift to electrified road transport has undoubtedly already commenced, according to Chris, and this is where D-Incert comes in.

He says preparing society requires the involvement of many different stakeholders, along with dedicated research. Questions need to be answered about technical aspects, social behaviour, space and infrastructure, future mobility concepts, governance and business.

“To overcome barriers and obtain focus in the fragmented worlds of science, government and business there is a clear need for a theme-oriented approach,” Chris adds. Consequently, D-Incert works to provide assistance with this.

Founded

The organisation was founded by the three technical universities in the Netherlands (TU Delft, TU Eindhoven and the University of Twente) in collaboration with two universities of applied sciences (Arnhem/Nijmegen and Rotterdam).

Electricity companies Eneco and Essent act as financial backers, along with Dutch railway tracks manager Prorail and the consumer organisation on mobility in the Netherlands (ANWB).

Market penetration

F042 Image 2

Chris believes consumer acceptance is most crucial in getting EVs into the mainstream, particularly when it comes to “charging comfort at home, in the public environment and at work”.

In a recent study by the British Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, released in October 2008, it was suggested market penetration of EVs is heavily dependent on government actions. These actions include CO2 pricing, taking up a supportive role in setting up the charging infrastructure and providing certainty to investors by providing a lucid long-term policy aimed at stimulating clean transport.

“A strong government policy framework will, of course, stimulate the development of EV technology,” Chris explains.

In operation

To help with D-Incert’s plan to fill in gaps in knowledge, two projects are currently in operation, he states. One is on the system integration of the electricity and road transport infrastructure and the other is on the integration of electric mobility in the built environment. Results of the latter will be available this year.

The ideas for such projects take root at D-Incert’s platform meetings, with its partners forming the coalition and producing the funding proposals.

So far, all of its partners are in the Netherlands, but many of them have strong international relations or are part of a multi-national organisation. A clear vision for the whole of Europe could be the ultimate goal.