

BEST is getting better

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Last year *MindsinMotion.net* featured a profile on the BioEthanol for Sustainable Transport, or BEST Project, in Rotterdam. One year later, we catch up with BEST Rotterdam project leader John Akkerhuis for a progress report.

[BEST](#)

And what a progress report it is. One of [BEST Rotterdam](#)'s goals was to put 950 flexi-fuel vehicles on the region's roads by the time the project ends in 2009. In fact, John reports that the project has smashed this target, reaching a staggering 1,800 vehicles at the beginning of 2009 – very nearly double its target, and almost a quarter of all the flexi-fuel vehicles currently on the road in The Netherlands, which stands at around eight thousand.

[F034 Image 2](#)

Hindsight

Given this fantastic success, in hindsight BEST Rotterdam's initial targets look totally unambitious. But at the time the project began, getting 950 flexi-fuel vehicles on the streets of Rotterdam looked a tall order, and its aim to see two thousand in the country as a whole somewhat optimistic. As it turns out, the project has almost reached its national target in Rotterdam alone.

John isn't taking all the credit for himself, though, citing the support of Ford, Saab and Volvo and the oil companies Argos and Tamoil as major contributors to the success.

Sidelined

Unfortunately, other elements of BEST's plans were not so successful. Plans for an ethanol bus had to be put on hold due to problems over timing, for example. Another scheme to be sidelined was the idea to get all Rotterdam filling stations to offer biofuels.

"The sites where fuel stations can be run are auctioned every few years, and the original idea was that we would await the next auction then demand the station offers biofuels," he explains. "But in reality, the whole process was far too slow for our project. So we decided to take another strategy, and now we are using local government funding to subsidise biofuel stations instead."

The subsidy should lead to ten E85 stations in Rotterdam. There are currently three, offering a total of six biofuel pumps, with another five filling stations selling HE15 for use in existing petrol

vehicles.

Non-committed

But John is far from complacent about the achievements of BEST Rotterdam, and stresses that there are still significant problems to overcome, such as the lack of government assistance.

“We’re getting there bit by bit, and almost everyone among the policy makers now agrees on the need to get behind biofuels. But at the national political level, it still hasn’t come through,” he says.

John attributes the lack of firm action to the Government’s non-committed attitude, explaining that, because many decision makers are not sure exactly where the discussion on biofuels is going, they’re content to do nothing.

[F034 Image 1](#)

Persistence

But he believes that ultimately the persistence of groups like BEST will pay off, pointing to successes like the biofuel filling station subsidy.

As reasons for optimism he also highlights the Netherlands’ leading role in the creation of European sustainability criteria, and a second subsidy arrangement, which should lead to about one hundred biofuel fuelling points all over the country during 2009.

Tough challenge

With the end of BEST in sight – it finishes at the end of December this year – the project only has another eight months or so to convince the Government that biofuels really are viable. It’s a tough challenge, but one John is confident of meeting.

“Bio-ethanol is a good alternative for petrol in the transition towards sustainable transport. The Government will start to stimulate E85 eventually. That’s why Rotterdam will continue to stimulate the use of E85 after the BEST project has stopped,” he says.