

Beer-filled canals

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A second beer boat will do a lot of good to the air in the narrow streets of the medieval city centre of Utrecht, the Netherlands.

The first electric cargo vessel of the Netherlands is carrying a festive load: beer. As of this morning it will bring some relief to the busy schedule of Utrecht's first (diesel driven) 'beer boat'.

Alderman Ms Marka Spit of ports would name the new ship today and send it on its maiden voyage through the canals. A spokesperson for the alderman told us that, instead of the traditional bottle of champagne, Ms Spit would be using 'municipal ale', which is a nickname for tap water, at the naming ceremony.

[N181 image 1](#)

Roots

The first beer boat has been in use since 1996 to supply the many bars and restaurants of the inner city with the golden brew. As of 2005 the vessel's cargo does not consist of beer alone anymore, the beer boat also delivers food. However, it is still called beer boat. The first one grew to be such a success that a second one is dearly needed.

All green

The narrow streets and passages in the historical centre of Utrecht present a problem to large trucks and the trucks present a problem to visitors and inhabitants of the city centre. As many of the town's pubs and restaurants border on canals, boats are the perfect means to supply hotel and catering industry (HCI). And, as of next week, they're a clean solution as well.

The new barge uses green electricity and transshipping is also electric, by means of an electric crane. It emits zero CO₂, which saves around 16.5 tonnes of CO₂ per year compared to truck haulage. The boat can go for eight to nine hours without recharging.

On a roll

Utrecht has gotten the hang of clean city distribution. It already has the [Cargohopper](#), an electric cargo train. Together with Cargohopper initiator Hoek transport and HCI wholesaler GEPU, the municipality made an Urban Distribution 2009 Award winning city distribution plan. They mean to establish further cooperation between Cargohopper and the beer boats.

At a symposium on distribution over water, to be held later today, plans of Utrecht for regional rather than just local distribution over water will be discussed. The city has the nation's largest inner port and a huge industrial zone, Lage Weide, which borders on water. Industries in the zone together handled five million tonnes of cargo in 2008 and six million in 2009.

The European Union co-finances the electric beer boat project, which is mainly paid for out of Utrecht's 'Actionplan Air quality' budget.

We asked the spokesperson whether, now that Utrecht is on a roll, the first beer boat will be replaced by a clean vessel as well. "That has yet to be looked into," she said, "but we are looking into a new electric garbage boat."