

Clean Energy Partnership – demonstration project

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What must come first, infrastructure or hydrogen fuel cell cars? In Berlin the Clean Energy Partnership (CEP) is working on the first. Good reason for motor companies to be optimistic.

Honda very recently announced their hydrogen fuel cell car to be taken into production as early as next year. Whereas skeptics point out the current lack of infrastructure, Honda trusts that facilities will fully develop once the car is on the market.

The CEP can help with that. Since its establishment in 2002 CEP intends “to keep tomorrow’s society mobile with clean fuels without any greenhouse gas emissions.” The focus is on hydrogen infrastructure. Partners are Aral, BMW, Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG), DaimlerChrysler, Ford, GM/Opel, Hydro, Linde, TOTAL, Vattenfall Europe and Volkswagen AG.

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Potential

The partnership believes hydrogen has the largest potential to achieve sustainable mobility. It therefore runs a five-year demonstration project. As part of the project CEP opened up the first of two hydrogen production and filling stations in 2004: an Aral station located at Berlin’s Messedam. Gaseous hydrogen is produced in-house, liquid hydrogen is imported. The second station, a TOTAL filling station, followed in 2006. Both are integrated in regular service stations.

Also, to demonstrate the everyday usability of hydrogen vehicles, there are 17 hydrogen cars divided over the stations, for customers to test-drive. Ford, for instance, provided three Ford Focus Fuel Cell Hybrid.

Ford

Judged by its goal the CEP may be expected to welcome a prompt introduction of hydrogen fuel cell cars for the consumer market. But some of the clean energy partners are Honda’s rivals. Monika Wagener of Ford Research Center Aachen GmbH, refused to comment on Honda’s announcement. She pointed out that, “since 2004, Ford already has a small production fleet of fuel cell cars on the roads in North America and Europe.”

Last year Richard Parry-Jones, Ford's Group Vice President, Global Product Development and Quality, claimed that, "it will be a decade at least before the fuel-cell car becomes viable for some customers and probably two decades for a significant number.

Maturity

On its website Ford maintains that the infrastructure be further developed first and that fuel cell technology be brought to technical and economic maturity before taking hydrogen fuel cell cars into production.

The company is convinced that hydrogen combustion technology will be ready for market before fuel cell technology.

Hand in hand

Ms. Wagener said, "the question of the infrastructure is, of course, crucial. The further establishment of cars and filling stations has to go hand in hand between automanufacturer and energy providers. This is the reason why we partner with oil companies and others in projects such as the CEP."

In the meantime Honda seems to be the only candidate to seriously enhance the demand for hydrogen and speed up the hand in hand process.