

Project profile: BEST Rotterdam

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Already famous as one of the world's largest and busiest shipping ports, Rotterdam is now attracting attention for an altogether different kind of transport.

Update 15 Jan 2008: according to Vermie, the target of 3,000 FFVs on the road is about to be met. Remaining challenge is to increase the availability of affordable E85. More on this issue soon here at MindsinMotion.net.

[P009 Image 1](#)

The Dutch city is one of ten taking part in the Bioethanol for Sustainable Transport (BEST) project. BEST is a four-year project, partly funded by the European Union (EU), in which three vehicle manufacturers, ten locations, five bioethanol producers and four universities will cooperate to accelerate the introduction of bioethanol as alternative transport fuel in Europe.

Ambition

"The aim is to create a large-scale demonstration of the successful use of bioethanol as motor fuel," explains Ton Vermie, project coordinator in Rotterdam, "with the ultimate ambition of achieving self-supporting market breakthrough."

He says that there are five strands to the project:

- BEST cars, running on E85 bioethanol
- BEST buses, running on E95 bioethanol
- developing the BEST low blend bioethanol fuels
- achieving the BEST distribution for biofuels, and
- introducing the BEST incentives to encourage greater biofuel use.

In sight

The targets in Rotterdam are ambitious, not only for the city itself, but in terms of the wider take-up it is hoping to encourage across the Netherlands. With two years of BEST to go, however, many of the targets are already in sight.

By 2009, the goal is to have 200 bioethanol cars in the city fleet; there are 40 so far. In other regional fleets around Rotterdam city, the aim is to have 750 bioethanol cars; there are currently 360. And at the national level, Vermie hopes to see another 2,000 bioethanol cars in local fleets; currently there are around 1,000.

“Overall, the target is to have 3,000 cars running on bioethanol in fleets across the Netherlands. We’re almost half way there at the moment, which is encouraging, but we’ve got to keep up the momentum,” says Vermie.

Mixed

For buses, the results so far are mixed. There has been some very encouraging research into E95 which shows that its particulate emissions are ten times lower than accepted EU levels. But whereas the aim was to develop a hybrid ethanol bus, the project has been part-cancelled due to the fuel costs.

Looking good

Low blend biofuels, including hydrous E15, have also achieved positive test results. The next step, says Vermie, is to introduce them into regional fleets.

Distribution, too, is looking good. The goal is to see 12 bioethanol pumps across Rotterdam. The first was opened in June 2006, and 11 others are in the pipeline, with the help of a subsidy. Moreover, by 2009, it will be mandatory for all filling stations in Rotterdam to offer biofuels.

Government support

Vermie does highlight a couple of on-going problems, though. The high cost of E85 is a continuing impediment to wider take-up, and there are still too few bioethanol vehicles on the market. Furthermore, Vermie says the government is not doing enough to stimulate the biofuel market.

“The government could do more to make flexi-fuel vehicles a little cheaper. It could help reduce the cost of E85 and it could help facilitate more biofuel filling stations,” he says.

But even without that strong government support, he sees a bright future for bioethanol fuels. “Despite the hindrances, such as high costs and lack of national incentives in the Netherlands, BEST is proving that bioethanol has the potential to be a major success story,” says Vermie.

Participants

BEST participants are Saab Automobile, Ford of Europe and Omni/Scania from the automotive

sector. The fuel producers involved come from Sweden (Sekab), Holland, Great Britain, Ireland and Brazil; the contributing universities are Umeå University (Sweden), Tsinghua University (China), Genoa University (Italy) and Imperial College (UK), and the participating locations are Stockholm, Rotterdam, Dublin, Madrid, Baskia, La Spezia, Nanyang (China) and Sao Paulo (Brazil), in addition to the county of Somerset (UK) and the Biofuel Region (Sweden).