International Coach Conference
Economic impact of coach tourism remains high

Of all transport means, the bus and coach industry contributes most to the environment, mobility and tourism but was and still is hardly heard by policy makers at all levels. That is what we learned from the International Coach Conference. Concrete, unambiguous and indisputable figures are urgently needed to convince politicians of the economic impact of coaches.

Due to the repeated lack of accurate figures, the Bundesverband Deutscher Omnibusunternehmer (BODO) calculated the economic impact of coach tourism, intercity bus services and the use of public transport services by tourists. In total, Germany accounted for 14,275 billion euro in 2015. That is to be supplemented by another 6.53 billion euros of indirect sales through VAT, concessions and the like. Employment in the coach tourism industry yields a sixfold multiplicative effect. Travel by bus and coach should therefore not be regarded as a problem but as a solution for economic and sustainable perspectives to be pursued.

If cities focus on coaches, they should rather look at how they generally deal with tourism, events, sport events and congresses. When you go for tourism, people always need transportation so it must be provided. In that light, it was suggested to work more closely with local public transport companies. For example, the German research revealed that 70% of the intercity bus passengers switch to local public transport upon arrival at the city centre. When you move the intercity stop to the periphery, up to 50% switches to their own car to make the trip.

What also plays a role at the local level is the underlying idea among politicians that tourists are not among their potential voters. In large cities, the impact of coach tourism is much more difficult to calculate than in villages where the result is often easier to measure.

The panel called for professional associations to get inspired by the German study to carry out similar studies and take these to regional and local policy makers. Only irrefutable figures can convince them of the actual impact of coach tourism and can help in encouraging them to take coach-friendly measures. Today, coaches are too often driving around in circles in the cities because there are no parking facilities or because bus parking spaces are too far away from the centre.

German research provides concrete figures

At Busworld, Van Hool presented the first of thirty hybrid diesel-electric ExquiCity 18m buses that will be delivered to Belfast. Starting from September 2018, the Belfast Rapid Transit Glider will run on a BRT network which guarantees a connection between East Belfast, West Belfast and the Titanic Quarter every 7-8 minutes. Belfast invests around 90 million pounds or 114.5 million euros in the development of the BRT network.

Each Glide, as the brand name of the transport concept reads, can carry up to 105 passengers. Real-time information on board, automatic announcement of stops, free Wi-Fi, USB contact points for charging smartphones and tablets as well as air-conditioning are all standard features.

Many prizes at Busworld Awards Night

Thursday night was Awards Night at Busworld. A first night full of prizes to award to the manufacturers and bus companies at this well-visited Busworld. A first night because it was a new set-up. The Awards Night attracted a lot of visitors, who experienced a remarkably cozy and spectacular night, presented by Mikele Dobbeels and Jochem. With songs and sketches in great bus atmospheres, they managed to captivate the audience. A long row of prizes was handed over to the various manufacturers. They started off with the Sustainable Bus in three categories, followed by the International Coach of the Year 2018 award – a prize that was introduced by trade journalists and for which the jury now counts 22 countries – and twelve Busworld Awards in the categories Design, Comfort, Safety, Ecology and Innovation. These twelve Awards are the result of performing tests all weekend in and around Kortrijk on twenty vehicles by thirty jury members, coming from the bus and coach sector, operators, drivers and experts. Altogether, it brought about a spectacular evening with a great show.

30 Van Hool ExquiCity 18m buses for Belfast Rapid Transit Glider

At Busworld, Van Hool presented the first of thirty hybrid diesel-electric ExquiCity 18m buses that will be delivered to Belfast. Starting from September 2018, the Belfast Rapid Transit Glider will run on a BRT network which guarantees the citizens modern, efficient and fast public transport. Throughout the day, there would be a connection between East Belfast, West Belfast and the Titanic quarter every 7-8 minutes. Belfast invests around 90 million pounds or 114.5 million euros in the development of the BRT network.

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ZF launches CeTrax

just under a year ago, ZF introduced its new Central Drive for electrically powered buses. This year at Busworld, ZF brought a Higer equipped with this central drive, CeTrax, to the outdoor area for demos. The Higer, a Chinese bus, was originally equipped with a Siemens drive. ZF Friedrichshafen took that out and replaced it by their own CeTrax.

The whole is powered by large supercaps that provide enough energy for 20 to 25 kilometres. To demonstrate this, journalists were driven from Busworld to the centre of Kortrijk and back. A distance of which parts are interchangeable. At least, ZF’s test bus with CeTrax central drive.

Cummins goes electric

Cummins goes electric, as we learned from the press conference on the first day of Busworld 2017. From now on, Cummins provides a fully electric drive unit range or one with a range extender, i.e. an electric drive with batteries that are fed on a regular basis through a diesel generator.

What was also announced right before Busworld is that Cummins acquired a US company that develops and supplies energy storage through batteries.

Cummins is known as the company whose engines are found in many buses and trucks, while it is rather unknown among the general public. Name recognition is not their thing. Nevertheless, quite a few vehicles around the world run on Cummins’ diesel or gas engines. Every year, more than 60,000 buses with a Cummins engine roll out of the factories. The company, which is over one hundred years old, has been working with electric drive units since 1995. What they did is develop a modularity built-in, which parts are interchangeable. At least, the same engine can be used in the next vehicle in another configuration.

Light diesel generator

For the diesel-generator-powered range extended CeTrax, Cummins uses a very light 2.8 litre diesel engine that feeds the battery with 120 kW (160 hp) power and the electric engine. This engine is at least sixty percent smaller than the average engine in a city bus. Cummins claims that tests have shown that this engine consumes only eighteen litres of diesel per one hundred kilometres. The range extender should be able to do this again and again. It started 135 kilometres in zero emission mode. Please note that the diesel feeds the battery and does not power the engine. The standard battery supplied by Cummins should be good for up to 360 kilograms of action radius, if full capacity is used. By default, the battery is 70 kW, but it can be increased eightfold to 560 kW.

Peak power

Both the battery version as the one with the range extender offer a torque of 1,850 Nm but this can increase if necessary to a peak level of 3,400 Nm. The electric engine, developed by Cummins itself, generates a power of 15 kW (202 hp) up to a peak power of 150 kW (469 hp).

Cummins obviously uses braking energy recovery, which may contribute up to 20 percent to the battery charge. An electronic control module keeps track of which systems require power so it can be provided in the best order. Such systems include the electronic power steering, air compressor, fans and the like. Enabling them at the times they are needed will save the necessary energy. During the Busworld press conference, it was emphasized that, next to city buses, the system would also be ideal for city distribution vehicles.