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Topic: As well as seeking alternative fuels, should we be changing our entire transportation culture?

The search for alternatives to liquid petroleum – gasoline and diesel – already represents a paradigm change of the status quo ‘transportation culture.’ Changing the ‘transportation culture’ involves a different combination of fuels, technologies, and consumer behavior, both in purchasing and selecting appropriate transport modes for different applications in different regions. Ultimately, in the long term, undoubtedly there will be modal shifts in transport use, new concepts and technologies that might be ‘game changers’ in transport, but at this time, a shift toward alternative fuels as part of the overall fuel mix is quite enough of a paradigm change.

Policy makers, technology and fuel stakeholders, and the public are struggling today to make sensible, achievable and transitory choices. The options selected should maintain (and increase) the quality of human mobility but simultaneously maintain (and improve) environment quality, motivate renewable options without creating additional negative effects, and provide reliable, sustainable and secure sources of energy.

Understanding the basic ‘rules of engagement’

In the quest to change the transportation culture, there are some fundamental ‘realities’ that should guide the choices we make.

- *Future fuels and technologies.* Petroleum fuels and internal combustion engines, with continual improvements in quality and efficiency, will continue to dominate at least 50% of transportation mobility for the rest of the 21st century.
- *Alternatives.* All of the alternative fuels have their positive attributes as well as technological and/or cost issues that remain a challenge to their commercialization. There are no ‘fuel panaceas’, which infers that a fundamental balance must be achieved in the development of policies that encourage the commercial growth of the various fuel alternatives.
- *Consumer choice.* Ultimately, the private and public sector customers can make the best, informed decision possible about which of these fuels and technologies to adopt.
- *Integrated, transparent policies.* Policy makers’ approach should be oriented toward policies and actions that tend to be take an ‘integrated’ and systemic (or holistic) view in helping to create a sustainable future for existing and new transport modes and fuels. This means creating policies and market opportunities that often may require the integration and balancing of economic, tax, environmental, energy, security, and transportation policies. It also will include consideration of agricultural policies, urban development, and management of various urban and rural waste management activities that are intended to capitalize opportunities for energy efficiency, energy conservation, and increased use of renewable resources.

- *Partners in politics.* In 'politics' the different alternative fuel stakeholders should be partners in striving for the best, most transparent policies that advance the group of alternative fuels. This more-or-less 'transparent' approach is one that also must be consistent among government policy makers at all levels.

The time is right to achieve a balanced, European Alternative Fuel Vehicle Policy

The motivations for a European policy focused on clean alternative transportation fuels – and cleaner traditional fuels – have been based on overriding concerns about energy security, environmental protection, climate change mitigation and energy efficiency. The EU wants to rely less on imported petroleum and more on sustainable, renewable transportation fuels. Increasingly strict emissions regulations and other policies are driving down vehicle exhaust pollution. Concerns about global warming have resulted in CO₂ becoming a regulated emission. But transportation policy making since the 1980s has been based upon finding the 'silver bullet' solution. As such, attempts at 'changing the transportation culture' have been dominated by disjointed policies that jump from option to option; all electric in the 1980s; hydrogen fuel cells in the 1990s; then hybrids in 2000; to renewable liquid biofuels and now, 2010, back again to all electric battery vehicles. Meanwhile, other options like natural gas and liquid petroleum gas (LPG) frequently have been marginalized due to enthusiasm for 'sexier' alternatives.

The key question is: Can the EU develop a balanced, sustainable, and effective alternative fuels policy (with measureable results) that fulfills the objectives of energy security and commitment to environmental protection?

Creating a balanced approach to changing the transportation culture is possible.

A successful alternative fuels policy must first be balanced and transparent in order to address the key concerns of each of the main groups of stakeholders: the consumers who will buy and drive the vehicles; the fuel suppliers who will help to build the fuelling infrastructure; and the OEMs who must find an economically viable pathway to develop and sell clean fuel vehicles that can be embraced by consumers who can easily find adequate fuelling stations on a European scale. Additionally, concerns must be addressed to take into consideration other important societal priorities such as: reducing the negative impacts of climate change; reducing environmental impacts of vehicle pollution; addressing the need to move more to renewable resources; and reducing reliance on nearly 100% petroleum in the transportation sector. Incorporating concerns of other integrated urban problems such as waste and water quality management adds another benefit to a well-conceived alternative fuels policy.

The transportation culture, indeed, must change but it will be done incrementally over a long transition. There are no 'bridges' to the future; there are only pathways. Identifying where we want to be, what route to take, and following a visionary, sustainable plan is an obtainable goal. The future is a big place and it will take a long time to get there.

These comments are based upon and adapted from Clean Fuels Consulting contribution to the European Commission's *Public Consultation on the Communication on a Sustainable Future for Transport*,

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