

A visionary new path

Jeffrey Seisler calls on the commission to consider three guiding principles of long term R&D funding



**Jeffrey Seisler is
CEO of Clean Fuels
Consulting**

When it comes to investments in research, development and demonstration, governments tend to fund long term projects that, without financial subsidies, the private sector might otherwise do without. For R&D funding of alternative fuel development, the European commission framework programmes have followed this general rule. By the end of FP7, the commission will have spent €1bn on hydrogen fuel cell development and millions more on electric and hybrid electric vehicle R&D.

For the upcoming FP8 it might be time to look at the 'pathway business' and invest in technologies such as gaseous fuel combustion engines that would be helped by some basic R&D funding in order to maintain an ecological and economical competitive opportunity as part of the alternative fuel mix.

The commission should consider three guiding principles of long term R&D funding. First, large sums of money can be invested in scientific or engineering developments, but it cannot replace the time it often takes to create commercially viable products and technologies. It must also be aware of 'hype before hardware' – scientific, economic and cost claims about pre market-entry products that can fuel false hopes and result in misdirected R&D funding for products that may never come to fruition. Finally, improved transparency and accountability is required to make it easier to decipher where – on which technologies and projects – public funds are being spent. Quantifiable EU R&D financial data is virtually impossible to track. The new FP8 programme should be visionary but also support the pathway from where we are today to where we want to be tomorrow. ★