

Energy green paper is a failure of vision

BY CILLIAN DONNELLY

INDUSTRY figures have reacted with surprise and disappointment to the lack of "vision and leadership" that governed the European Commission's green paper on energy.

Speaking after the release of the paper, Jeffrey Seisler, Executive Director of the European Natural Gas Vehicle Association (ENGVA), admitted that he could only give "minimal reaction" to the paper "because there was minimal coverage in terms of the transport sector".

The green paper sought to address issues of competition, security of supply and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through a common energy policy, but, says Seisler, it has failed to include in its scope a sector that accounts for a large proportion of energy consumption: transport.

"We were surprised and a little disappointed that there wasn't any focus on energy consumption in one of the segments of society that involves some of the largest areas of energy consumption, so there's not much to be able to react

to, because it doesn't really provide the vision or leadership that to the transport section that we were looking for".

There are currently about 561,000 natural gas vehicles (NGVs) in Europe, and advocates of the fuel source claim that vehicles that run on natural gas can reduce CO₂ emissions by between 20 and 25% as compared to gasoline fuelled cars.

"There was substantial input from some of the internal policy makers about including information about the transport sector, and on including in-

formation on the contribution of NGVs and other alternative fuels", says Seisler when asked about whether some form of bias exists in the Commission's thinking, "but I really couldn't say why it's been dropped".

Turn to page ??

Ultimately, says Seisler, a separate directive on the subject should be issued. "I assume it's going to appear somewhere else, in some other initiative. I would hope so".

"if you're not going to address the transport sector, you're missing out".

Opposing visions of the future

PREDICTING the future can be tricky. To anticipate and meet the challenges of tomorrow, can be a daunting prospect for any industry, writes Cillian Donnelly.

Take the story of the two gas company executives who approach a table on which is a pair of binoculars. The first executive picks up the binoculars, and looking through the large lenses, says, 'the future is so far away'. The second executive picks up the binoculars and, looking through the small lenses says, 'you're wrong, the future is right in front of us'.

Jeffrey Seisler, Executive Director of the European Natural Gas Vehicle Association (ENGVA) is in an illustrative mood. Whether it's binoculars, snowballs, chickens and eggs or elephants and ants, it appears there is no shortage of metaphors.

"It's the old chicken and the egg theory, which comes first, the vehicles or the fuelling stations?"

"In the energy sector there are elephants and ants", he explains. "There's the big gas elephant, and we're the natural gas ants who are just trying to change direction before we get crushed".

ENGVA represent the interests of natural gas vehicles (NGVs) in Europe. Ultimately, they are fighting perception, continues Seisler, and are trying to change the status quo. But, the overhaul

of the market in Europe, and the integration of natural gas into the energy mix brings with it inherent problems for the natural gas sector. Once again, there's an illustrative point.

"It's the old chicken and the egg theory, which comes first, the vehicles or the fuelling stations? That's a problem that's endemic in a lot of technologies that have to build an infrastructure for commercialisation.

The solution, says Seisler, is the simultaneous introduction of vehicles and stations. "We have to get the cars on the road as well as the infrastructure. The way the natural gas industry has addressed that challenge is, in the early years, to convert petrol vehicles to run on a combination - either natural gas or gasoline. This is what we call bi-fuel vehicles. We want to have total dedicated natural gas vehicles, but you can't move to that until you have a fuel infrastructure in place".

Strong united front

With such a mammoth logistical task as regards infrastructure, and with the public perception of natural gas as being somehow dangerous or expensive, a strong united front from interested parties and stakeholder is needed to strengthen the industry's position in the market. So far, this approach has been successful in Germany, Italy and France, and, to a lesser extent, Switzerland and Sweden.



Jeffrey Seisler, Executive Director of the European Natural Gas Vehicle Association (ENGVA)

"There's the gas and oil industries, the car manufacturers, consumers and government", Seisler explains, "and we need to pull those forces together and work in a consensus mode where the government is providing certain incentives, the technologists agree to look, in a very pragmatic and functional way, at a way of producing the technology, and the gas and oil industries, particularly the gas industry, will put the fuel on the

market, and the consumers are attracted to join this for environmental reasons and for economic reasons".

What is needed is what Seisler calls "intellectual leadership", someone with the vision required to embrace the future.

"Too many leaders are looking at the big side", he says, returning to the binoculars. That's the status quo. And now we're back to elephants".