Busworld Europe will see many innovations

In the last few years, the bus and coach industry has gone through a more rapid period of product development than ever seen before. This is having an impact on operators, manufacturers, and suppliers of ancillary components and services.

This pace of change will become clearly apparent at Busworld Europe, the first edition to be held in the Expo Centre in Brussels, from 18 to 23 October. While it has been a wrench to leave the traditional home in Kortrijk, the move to Brussels offers much more space for exhibitors and visitors. The capital of Belgium is easier to reach and has far more hotels and restaurants. There are excellent transport links to the Expo Centre, and they will benefit exhibitors and visitors. New bi-articulated Van Hool buses will run on a Bus Rapid Transit service between the airport and the Expo Centre.

Registrations of buses and coaches above 8.0 tonnes gross in Western Europe in 2018 were slightly higher than the previous year, with encouraging signs of growth in Italy and Spain. Operators have accepted Euro VI engines and in many cases have found improvements in fuel economy, compared with previous engines.

On city buses, there are interesting trends. While the market is still dominated by diesel buses, demand is being impacted by CNG, hybrid and electric vehicles. Those who predicted ten years ago that hybrid vehicles might be a passing phase are being proved correct. Hybrid appears, more and more, to be a stepping stone towards full electric propulsion.
Two years ago, at Busworld Europe, there were plenty of electric buses and minibuses on view, but sales tended to be in small numbers. Understandably, the operating industry wanted to proceed carefully with the new technology, learning how to recharge, repair and use the new electric vehicles in all climates and in all kinds of terrain, day and night.

That phase is still around, but some of those who have had experience of electric buses now feel more confident and are placing large orders. For instance, it is understood that Solaris and Mercedes-Benz were the only two manufacturers who had quoted ATM, Milan, for the supply of 250 electric buses.

At Busworld Europe, we can expect to see electric vehicles available from all the main manufacturers either on their booths, in the demonstration park, or in catalogues if space does not permit.

Coaches are likely to rely on diesel fuel for many years to come. They need to be flexible and capable of carrying large amounts of luggage on some assignments. However, they face the challenge that they might be excluded from historic cities which implement ultra low or zero emission zones.

The supply industry continues to innovate. A new bus without wi-fi, passenger information systems and closed circuit television is becoming rare. Passengers expect connectivity and a constant feed of information.

This in turn has brought large numbers of information technology suppliers into the industry. Modern satellite systems are a great help to drivers using unfamiliar roads. They can be accurate to within a metre or two and some can also warn about potential hazards like low or weak bridges.

Safety is also high on the agenda. The bus and coach industry has a commendably good record of very low numbers of people who are killed or seriously injured, whether on a vehicle or in a collision with a bus or coach. However, every death is a major tragedy not just for families and friends but also for the wider perception of the industry. As an example, there have been developments of mirror systems that are able to detect pedestrians and cyclists in what were previously considered to be blind spots.

Information technology developers and suppliers have been keen to work with the bus industry. Payment systems have become much more sophisticated but also much faster. When drivers had to handle cash, it took quite a long time for all the passengers to board the vehicle. Tap-in and scanning systems work so rapidly that a boarding passenger does not have to break his or her pace.

Office to vehicle communication has been around for several years but is always getting better. Workshops can monitor the performance of a vehicle on the road. The next development is vehicle to vehicle communication. To give an example, a coach travelling towards Brussels can pass a message to one coming out of the city advising of an accident ahead.

We will be publishing further editions of the Busworld Times in the coming weeks so if you have any innovation that you plan to launch at Busworld Europe, please let us know and we will mention it without any charge to you. Please send your news to inge.buytaert@busworld.org
Busworld Central Asia coming

The first edition of Busworld Central Asia will be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 25 to 27 June 2019. Almaty is the largest city in this vast country but the capital is Astana. Kazakhstan is the hub of other neighbouring “stans” countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Kazakhstan was formerly part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its public transport systems were closely modelled on those of Russia. The country relied heavily on Russia for buses and that continued for several years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Kazakhstan has massive size and large reserves of oil and gas. The country is larger than Western Europe in territory and is land-locked. That creates a challenge in exporting oil and gas but demand is strong from countries like its neighbour, China.

Bus manufacturers from outside the former USSR have been making steady inroads to the Kazakh market. There is demand for low floor layouts and also alternative fuels like CNG. There is some local assembly of buses but the potential to increase that quite considerably.

It is estimated that 50% of the population of around 18.5 million people live in urban centres. Alternative means of public transport are very limited, so that will stimulate demand for better and more frequent bus services.

There are banking, financial and legal systems in place to support the import of vehicles, components and services. It is estimated that more than $40 billion worth of foreign investment has been pumped into Kazakhstan in the oil, natural gas and mineral industries in the last fifteen years or so. These industries will also require transport, principally for employees.

Busworld Academy will hold its inaugural session in Central Asia with a conference entitled

“Futuristic Transportation Solutions for Central Asia” which will be all about shaping tomorrow’s public transport in Central Asian countries. The Academy will host presentations by a number of experts with knowledge of the Kazakhstan and regional markets.

Kazakhstan and Almaty may seem a long distance away, but the country is nearer to Europe than China. There are regular flights and visitors from most countries can obtain short-term visa-free entry. Kazakhstan is the hub at the centre of a region that is growing rapidly in importance and Busworld Central Asia promises to be a leading event in the region.

International Bus Conferences

Once again, Busworld will team up with UITP to hold an International Bus Conference in Brussels from 21 to 23 October. This is a major event, hosted by two of the most respected international organisations active in the bus and coach industry and public transport. UITP has its headquarters in Brussels, supported by a number of regional offices around the world.

These conferences cover many current topics in the industry, looking at trends and developments from an international perspective. The last edition, at Busworld Europe in Kortrijk, was highly successful and sold out! There were 500 participants, 40 speakers, 10 hours of networking time and 15 conference sessions – all at a very high international level.

The International Bus Conference is the ideal way to stay informed about best practice in the bus industry from an international perspective. The provisional conference programme includes a wide range of topics such as comfort and safety - bus certification and new energy - advancing bus transport with innovative technologies - service contracting and tendering - and happy customers and staff.

The Conference will also explore business opportunities beyond traditional operations. This will explore entering the new energy market - smart bus systems of the future - station development - and funding and financing.

The great benefit of this Conference is not only to hear about new developments from experts in their field, but to be able also to visit Busworld Europe to see many of the latest ideas in the metal.

The International Bus Conference is the leading event of its kind but the number of delegates has to be limited, so be sure to make your booking on www.busworldacademy.org as soon as you can from 1 June onwards.
The Busworld Academy is organising a full programme of conferences during Busworld Europe in the Brussels Expo Centre. The complete programme can be found on www.busworldacademy.org and delegates are invited to pre-register free of charge from June 1 onwards. The Academy is keen to emphasise that its conferences and seminars are open to everyone.

High on the list of topics are autonomous buses, their regulation and judicial aspects. At present, most autonomous buses are small vehicles, typically capable of carrying around eight to ten passengers. Some are in trial service, for instance at universities which have the technical capabilities to monitor and develop them.

More recently, full size 12-metre autonomous buses have been launched by Alexander Dennis, Iveco Bus, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo. One common restriction is their inability to be used on public roads without a qualified driver who normally sits hand-free but can take over in the event of an emergency. Obtaining full autonomy will require a major change in legislation in all countries where autonomous buses are likely to be operated. They will also have to be able to convince passengers of their total safety.

Already, autonomous systems have demonstrated that they can work in restricted spaces in bus depots, taking the vehicle from its driver at its point of arrival and putting it through the various stages of refuelling, exterior washing and parking for the next shift. Autonomous controls enable buses to park closer to each other while also reducing minor damage that can be a problem with night staff in some fleets. Autonomous controls can save on the number of people required in the depot overnight and can also be used to bring the bus to a convenient point where the driver can collect it to start his shift.

The systems that are installed in autonomous buses also benefit drivers when they are used in regular service on public roads. They assist drivers by identifying potential hazards, such as other road users and pedestrians. They help to simplify the driver’s job.

Busworld will hold a conference on autonomous buses in collaboration with VIAS, the Belgian Institute for Traffic Safety. While some aspects of this ground-breaking conference are based on projects in Belgium, homologation of autonomous vehicles is likely to be a task for the European Commission and therefore applicable in many more countries.

**BUSWORLD AWARDS MOVES TO BRUSSELS**

The popular Busworld Awards competition which used to precede the opening of Busworld fairs in Kortrijk will now take place in Brussels on 12 October. The static tests will be carried out on the Eeuwfeestlaan in front of the world-famous Atomium. Moving tests will be carried out on public roads in and around Brussels.

The Busworld Awards are open to any vehicle with a European certificate of conformity that is being exhibited in Busworld Europe.

Alstom, Altas Auto, Anadolu Isuzu, Blue Solutions, Carrocerias Ayats, Daimler Buses, Ebusco, Indcar, In-Tech/Citaro, Iveco, MAN, Rafako, Solaris, Van Hool, VDL, Volvo Buses and Yutong have confirmed their participation with at least 1 vehicle.

Vehicles taking part should be either a bus or a coach. In addition to the Grand Award in each category, there will be four Busworld Awards Labels: for Safety - Comfort and Ergonomics - Ecology - and Styling and Design.

These will be awarded a maximum of one time to the vehicle with the highest score but, if the jury is unable to find a vehicle which in its opinion is not sufficiently outstanding, a specific Label will not be granted. There will be separate Labels for buses and coaches, with a potential maximum of eight Labels.

It has always been the tradition for winning vehicles to display their awards proudly during Busworld.
Threats from zero emission zones

There are both threats and opportunities on the horizon for bus and coach manufacturers and operators. The Euro VI standards have been in force for several years and are demonstrating admirably low levels of emissions.

However, the European Union has been monitoring air quality in many cities and is demanding urgent action for cleaner air, principally to improve standards of health, especially for children. At the same time, diesel has become a dirty word in the mainstream media following the cheating scandals by more than one car maker. Fortunately, most of the media seems to realise that there are much more strict test standards for heavier vehicles, including buses and coaches.

There is no doubt that some urban areas suffer badly from air pollution and steps must be taken to reduce it. This has created political pressure for the introduction of ultra low or zero emission zones in urban areas. This is a major challenge for bus operators. They need to know that, if they buy Euro VI buses today, they will still be acceptable in fifteen years time.

When emission standards are established internationally, everyone is on a level playing field. When local politicians create limits for their cities, that is a completely different issue. For instance, the target in Paris is to have, by 2025, a fleet of 4,500 buses of which two thirds are zero emission and the other third run on natural renewable biogas. That will require a massive investment not just in vehicles but also in recharging facilities at each depot.

In London, the Mayor has introduced an Ultra Low Emission Zone, covering much of the central area. All the buses that run within this area are Euro VI, hybrid or electric. However, it has caught out many coach operators and caused serious problems for tourism and the theatre business. A pre Euro VI coach has to pay one hundred Pounds per day to enter the ULEZ zone. The coach owner has to pass that on to his passengers and also suffers from a sharp drop in the resale value of any pre Euro VI coach in his fleet.

Continuing with the need for a level playing field, local legislators are often reluctant to restrict the owners of older cars, because, a cynic might say, every car owner is a local voter! The number of cars entering urban areas must be restricted. That will further reduce emissions, reduce congestion, and speed up the flow of traffic, because there will be less stop-start driving.

If the use of cars can effectively be restricted, buses can play a major role in urban transport, offering faster and more comfortable journey times. This will make services more acceptable to existing passengers and hopefully encourage new customers.

Bus manufacturers have made major progress in the reduction of vehicle emissions but, by their nature, buses tend to have an operating life of at least 15 years, therefore many vehicles built to earlier emission limits remain in daily service in urban centres. There need to be incentives to encourage the replacement of these older buses. Manufacturers and operators need to sit down with local authorities and legislators to plan how this can be done economically and reasonably while still helping to meet urban air quality limits.
First Busworld South East Asia exceeds expectations

The very first edition of Busworld South East Asia was held in Jakarta from 20 to 22 March. Almost 4,200 trade visitors came to the exhibition to see the latest buses and coaches, components and spare parts.

Major manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz and Volvo participated in the exhibition in this large and important market. Among the domestic manufacturers, Laksana exhibited four new Prime Legacy coaches. New Armada is another prominent domestic bodybuilder in a market that is dominated by combinations of chassis and bodywork.

Transjakarta, reputedly the world’s longest Bus Rapid Transit system at 251km, participated and said that it carried an average of 660,000 passengers per day. The network has a total of 155 routes operated by 1,500 buses, with plans to double that number.

Transjakarta is the first and only BRT system in Indonesia with international standards. The system has set the standards for other cities with high populations, not just in Indonesia but also other parts of South East Asia.

Busworld Academy organised a full programme concurrent with the exhibition and that included a panel discussion on the development of mass transportation. High capacity routes on dedicated corridors are in their infancy in South East Asia, but there is every prospect that they will develop in a similar manner to the expansion that has taken place in South America.

There are also many smaller bodybuilders in Indonesia, working in what is almost a fashion industry. They keep developing new designs, all equipped with air conditioning which is a necessity in the humid climate.

Didier Ramoudt, President of Busworld International, visited all the stands on the last day of the exhibition and then concluded: “I am very happy to hear that the exhibitors are all satisfied about their participation and willing to come back in two years. The market in Indonesia was clearly waiting for a bus only exhibition. I am sure that together with our two main partners, Askarindo and Ipomi, we will double the size of the exhibition in 2021!”

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