



"In 2019 we will operate 100 hydrogen stations in Germany" Interview with H2 Mobility

With more than 40 fueling stations now active, joint venture H2 Mobility continues to expand its network of hydrogen sites across Germany. Nikolas Iwan, Managing Director of H2 Mobility, spoke to PetrolPlaza about the company's development, the benefits of hydrogen and their participation in UNITI expo 2018.

Q. H2 Mobility will be exhibiting at UNITI expo 2018, where you will also carrying out a presentation on hydrogen and fuel cell technology. How important are trade shows like this for an up-and-coming company like yours?

A. We are building a nationwide hydrogen refuelling network that will link up Germany's key regions. Changing mobility is not a task we can solve alone. We need pioneers with spirit and determination. To meet those networking and exchange are necessary and trade fairs like the UNITI expo are great opportunities.

This year's UNITI expo will have a dedicated 'alternative fuels' sector. Do you think trade shows and professionals are showing enough interest in the subject of alternative fuels?

Well, it can always be more. But the interest in clean alternative fuels is growing. The discussion about bans for diesel vehicles and the mounting political pressure to reduce emissions in transport lead especially companies to looking for solutions to lower their emissions and trade shows are presenting them.

What are the key benefits of hydrogen compared to other types of fuel (traditional and alternative)?

Electric cars powered by hydrogen have similar benefits than conventional cars today – just without emissions. The cars can be fuelled in 3 minutes and drive 500 or more kilometres. But hydrogen is more, it is the energy carrier suitable as a seasonal storage medium and can enable sector coupling.

Many believe that the future won't be dominated by one single fuel but by a mix of them based on population, geographical conditions and resources available. In those terms, what kind of role can hydrogen play? Will it be more suited to light or heavy vehicles?

Private or public fleets?

Indeed, the future of mobility will be colourful. Batteries will play an important role, and hydrogen will as well. Both technologies should be seen as complementary: The strength of batteries is high efficiency and they are relatively cheap already, while fuel cell based drivetrains are stronger wherever time and weight plays a role. So, for heavier passenger vehicles and utility vehicles hydrogen makes a lot of sense. The strongest growth for fuel cells will be in fleets, the market for private users will take off in the 2020s.

H2 Mobility is an ambitious joint venture that includes various parties. Two years ago, you set the target of 400 hydrogen sites by 2023. Could you tell us how the rollout is going?

The rollout is progressing fast. In 2017 Germany was the country which opened the highest number of new hydrogen stations. In 2019 we will operate 100 stations in urban areas and along highways with a capacity to serve up to 40.000 vehicles. We have always said that further rollout will follow the demand, i.e. the number of hydrogen powered vehicles on the road. Our goal is indeed to build 400 stations, we just need enough demand to build them.

Has there been an increase in fuel-cell vehicle sales?

The sale of the new Mercedes GLC F-Cell as well as the sale of the Hyundai Nexo has not yet started (will start Summer/fall 2018). The available cars in the market are the Toyota Mirai and the Hyundai ix35 and both companies are pleased with their figures. We expect a robust growth with the two new models and further coming in 2019 and onwards.

What makes Germany a good market for this ambitious plan? If carried out, it would make Germany the leading country in hydrogen transport.

Germany is the automotive heartland of Europe and therefore best suited for a flagship project like H2 MOBILITY. Our shareholders, Air Liquide, Daimler, Linde, OMV, Shell and TOTAL are committed to this market and are investing in building the infrastructure. Germany also has a government with a strategy to transform the mobility sector and hydrogen plays a key role there. Backed by the ministry of transport the NOW GmbH – the National Organisation for Fuel Cells and Hydrogen – designed the right funding schemes to support the Shareholders' investment in the infrastructure. Finally, Germany has more and more volatile wind and solar power, best suited to produce hydrogen and allow storing the surplus energy for use in other sectors.