

WRIGHTBUS CASE STUDY

ADVANCED ENGINEERING (TRANSPORT) HORIZON PANEL



MARK NODDER

Group Managing Director, The Wright Group

Q. When was the company established?

A. The Wright Group was established by Robert Wright and his son William Wright over 60 years ago and remains, to this day, a family-owned business. The company has grown to become one of Europe's leading independent bus builders and we have strategic partnerships with chassis manufacturers Volvo and VDLBus.

Q. Where are your main markets?

A. Our main market is the United Kingdom, where our core activity is the design and manufacture of quality public service vehicles, and we have enjoyed great success there. In 2006 we provided the first high capacity vehicle fitted with hybrid technology to go into operation in London. We have also delivered over 200 double deckers to Hong Kong and our new StreetCar has stimulated great interest from customers across Europe and the US; later this year we will begin delivering 50 hybrid variants for Las Vegas.

Q. How did your initial phase of market expansion occur?

A. We were the first bodybuilder in the UK to identify low floor vehicles as a

potential market, to facilitate access for people with physical disabilities and also parents with baby pushchairs etc. After being told by many expert commentators within the bus industry that low floor vehicles would not 'take off', it is now the norm industry wide. This has now developed into a generation of buses designed not only to allow a passenger in a wheel-chair to have access but also to be conveniently positioned without using any step.

Q. What areas of research is your company currently working on?

A. For us research and innovation are fundamental to growth. We are constantly working to stay ahead of the market and this year the Wright Group, with the assistance of Invest Northern Ireland, has established a new high-tech subsidiary, Wright Composites. The new facility manufactures fibre glass components, not just for in-house production requirements, we are also in active discussions with manufacturers in sectors such as aerospace and marine applications. By establishing this groundbreaking facility and investing in R&D, we can capitalise on this cutting edge technology and begin to develop relationships with the local universities

which will add value to both the Wright Group's operations and, ultimately, the wider economy.

Q. What products do you regard as being particularly creative or innovative?

A. Our two most innovative products are the StreetCar and Electicity. StreetCar, a new 18.7m vehicle which breaks away from the traditional categories of transport is a bold initiative to reverse increasing congestion in urban areas and to encourage car users to make the change to public transport. Electicity, a hybrid-electric bus, offers the market a clean bus with ultra low emissions to help address the issues of global warming and air quality, while giving operators significant reductions in their daily operating costs. 12 Wright Electicity (diesel-electric hybrid) buses are in operation in London. They reduce CO2 emissions by at least 30% below current Euro 4 conventional bus levels and reduce fuel consumption by 34%.

Q. What do you think is the most pressing challenge facing the transport sector?

A. Climate change and environmental issues are creating a huge challenge

for our industry. I believe that it is our responsibility to create buses that will make public transport so irresistible that car users will choose it for some if not all of their journeys. This will not only help to reduce traffic congestion but will also lessen the damaging effects of carbon emission.

What would you like to see coming out of the MATRIX panel?

A. I think that the work of the MATRIX panel is particularly important to ensuring that Northern Ireland, as a whole, becomes internationally competitive. There are already a number of success stories from Northern Ireland, but we need more, and if MATRIX and the government can help facilitate R&D and innovation, hopefully this can not only continue, but also increase.

