

Sustaining the focus on sustainability

The carbon agenda was all the rage before the recession - but key players in the transport arena are keen to keep the subject alive



George Muir

▶ Now that the circus has moved on, it is a lonely business carrying the flame for sustainable transport; but Go Ahead, alone so far as one could see amongst the bus and train operators, did

that at the party conferences.

Stephen Hammond, former Conservative Party shadow transport minister, speaking at the *Building a Sustainable Future for Transport* fringe event in Manchester, sponsored by Go Ahead and Siemens, made the point: "Two years ago, all the talk would have been about climate change and carbon reduction, now the key question is: where's the cash?"

This is true, but after David Cameron's speech to the Conservative party, training and apprenticeships are going to get a lot of attention. Transport operators are major employers - Go Ahead itself employs over 22,000 people and has over 4,000 suppliers so it is well placed to make a positive impact on the economy. And among the highlights of its eleventh Corporate Responsibility (CR) report, published last week, was the fact that £12m was spent on training its staff last year - the equivalent of 90,500 hours of training. See more highlights in the panel on the right.

But sustainability is still considered something to shout about and the work to cut energy use and carbon emissions goes on at Go Ahead's bus and rail subsidiary companies. Chief executive David Brown summarised where the group had got to in delivering its plans established in 2007. Go Ahead will have reduced its CO₂ per journey by 20% by 2015 having reduced it by 12% already from its 2007/08 level.

Regenerative braking, fitted on all Southern and London Midland trains and on half of Southeaster's fleet, cuts electricity use by 7.5%. Bus drivers drive in a more fuel friendly way, aided by black box telematics fuel meters.

Hybrid buses would sharply cut fuel use, by around 30%, but they are 30% more expensive so 17 have been delivered for use in Oxford, but not many more can be ordered until the cost problem is solved. In property, modern lighting and heating systems cut energy substantially.

There is however only so much a passenger transport operator can do. Further energy reduction is in the hands of technologists and the suppliers who put new technology into practice. This was covered at the same fringe event by Steve Scrimshaw, managing director of Siemens Mobility Rolling Stock UK.

The new Desiro City from Siemens, as Mr Scrimshaw explained uses 50% less energy than a traditional train and carries 25% more people. It is the train shortlisted for the Thameslink contract.

More significant for the totality of transport was Mr Scrimshaw's description of Siemens' evolution into a major supplier of components for electric cars: electric drive technology, power electronics and the charging technology. Other than battery technology, which Siemens does not seem to be engaged in, these are the key components for a successful electric cars.

Siemens equipment is used in the new London Routemaster buses, which have been developed in partnership with Wrightbus, and Siemens has partnership arrangements for new cars with Volvo, BMW, Renault, Suzuki and others - I suspect that in the future Siemens will become a fully fledged car manufacturer in its own right.

The growing efficiency and acceptance of hybrid cars is by far the most important long term development for transport sustainability - assuming a decarbonised electricity supply. So much so that biofuel becomes a red herring; and indeed, this, once a prominent topic in discussion, was not mentioned at all in the fringe event. ■

CSR HIGHLIGHTS

▶ A 12% overall reduction in carbon emissions since 2007/08. This has been achieved through rolling out key Driving Energy Further initiatives including regenerative braking across the electric train fleet, eco-driving and track side coasting boards. 86% of Go Ahead's electric fleet now uses regenerative braking and this has resulted in a 7.5% year-on-year-improvement in fuel saving (equivalent to 36,000 tonnes of CO₂)

▶ A 17.6% reduction in bus accidents

▶ 18 new hybrid buses to operate the Oxford Park and Ride service

▶ Innovative community programmes, including the on-going Dennis Dart bus education scheme for primary school children in Plymouth

▶ Introduction of innovative schemes to improve safety on the rail network such as Eyewitness which enables staff to report crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour via text message or email

▶ Record levels of waste being recycled - 68% this year, compared with 52% last year

▶ Award-winning passenger initiatives including the use of social media to provide service updates to customers, marketing campaigns to encourage off-peak rail use and tactile maps to make the transport services more accessible

▶ £12m invested in staff training

▶ Further roll-out of Go Ahead's smartcard ticket known as 'the key'. The smartcard is in use across Go Ahead's companies and helps makes travel easier, saving people time when switching services and money, through the availability of multi-journey tickets

▶ Investors in People status attained by more Go Ahead businesses

▶ £12m spent on training staff last year - the equivalent of 90,500 hours of training

Silver in the Business in the Community 2011 Corporate Responsibility Index 2011.