

Malaysia Testing Electric Buses as Part of Green Future

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Malaysian Energy and Green Technology Minister Mahdzir Khalid, holding flag, welcomes the start of the electric bus pilot test project.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia –Malaysia is hoping part of the answer to its dirty air and traffic jams will come in the form of Chinese electric buses.

The bus, built by Chinese automaker BYD Co. Ltd., and called the K9 in China, is undergoing testing on how far it can travel on a charge. The goal is to put as many as 2,000 of these green buses on Malaysian roads by 2020, with the first bus traveling in downtown Kuala Lumpur by middle of next year.

“We expect the first batch of locally manufactured [electric] buses to be on the road by mid-2014,” said Hadri Haris, chief executive officer of Malaysian Green Technology Corp., the government agency also known as GreenTech Malaysia that is spearheading the project.

Malaysia has enlisted the local unit of Japanese electronic appliance maker Panasonic Corp. among others, to develop outlets for battery charging as the nascent electric vehicle industry grapples with a myriad of challenges, ranging from socket types to charging times. The government’s role is limited to testing the buses. Bus Rapid Transit, which is state operated, will run the buses on high-demand routes to gradually replace the diesel-powered buses currently in operation. Later, private companies will run some of the lines.

The pilot project is part of a push to cut carbon emission by 40% in Malaysia by 2020 and also reduce traffic congestion by boosting use of public transportation. About 2 million people live in Kuala Lumpur, and more than 300,000 people ride a bus every day.

Twenty charging stations are located around Kuala Lumpur. GreenTech Malaysia wants to expand the network nationwide, and is working with First Energy Network Sdn Bhd, a unit of Tan Chong Motor Holdings Bhd, which mainly assembles Nissan-branded vehicles in Malaysia, Panasonic Malaysia Sdn Bhd, and local research firm DFRAN Research Technologies Sdn Bhd.

Mr. Ahmad says that the initial tests will compare performance between electric buses and the diesel ones to determine whether it makes economical and environmental sense to turn to battery-powered buses.

“The focus of the study is primarily on energy consumption and environmental impact,” he added.

The buses are expected to travel 250km on a single charge. Their lithium iron-battery could take five hours and forty minutes to be fully charged. BYD-built buses have been deployed in other developed countries, including Belgium, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S.

“Based on the findings, we are confident that manufacturers and transport operators will be encouraged to adopt environmentally compatible green public transportation systems” that will help meet the national target of 10% electric vehicle use by 2020 from little use currently, Mr. Ahmad said.