Reviving Old Ideas

Dear Reader,

Following the road toll scandal, Andreas Scheuer, Head of the German Federal Ministry of Transport, has been forced to think outside the box and quickly come up with some new and innovative ideas. It may well be that the two new campaigns are Scheuer's attempt to distract attention from the compensation amounting to more than 560 million euros which could have to be paid to the three operators Autoticket, CTS-Eventim, and Kapsch TrafficCom because the contract has not been implemented as a result of the clear ruling by the European Court of Justice. The two innovative campaigns are an underground parcel delivery network and the resurrection of the Transrapid maglev train, in Munich of all places.

These new ideas, or rather old ones, have been presented like rabbits being pulled out of a hat. A smaller variant of the familiar, and largely discredited, Transrapid could be used as an internal transport solution at Munich airport, according to Andreas Scheuer. He has just commissioned the consultancy company Transport-Technologie-Consult Karlsruhe to produce a feasibility study. "We want [them] to investigate the technical, economic, and environmental potential of the technology in comparison with other means of transport and not only at Munich airport," explained Scheuer. But we should already have enough information as a result of the experience being acquired since the 1980s in the Emsland region of Germany and in Shanghai. A new 3.5-km demonstration track for the slow-running TSB mini-maglev, which now only travels at 150 km/h, is already in existence in Chengdu (China).

Residents of large cities in particular have a problem with delivery trucks. They double-park, block sidewalks, and pollute the air. The number of parcel deliveries and returns is only likely to increase given the

boom in online shopping. "I would be prepared to set up a pilot project in collaboration with a city which would involve converting an underground rail network into a special parcel delivery system," proposed Scheuer, who is a member of the conservative CSU party. The idea is that the underground trains could operate in the early hours of the morning, picking up parcels, sorting them, and distributing them to interim depots where they could be collected by people on electric cargo bikes and transported to their destinations above ground. This sounds a little like the good old mail trains that traveled through Prussia in the second half of the 19th century. You can find out more about the electric future of freight transport and the parcel delivery companies in our "In the Spotlight" article starting on page 8.

Scheuer must be hoping that the consultants on his two new projects, the mini Transrapid and the underground parcel delivery service, do a better job than the ones involved in the discredited project to impose road tolls, but only on foreigners.

Spring greetings from

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