



Platooning positives for MAN

An update on autonomous networked vehicle trials came to the fore at truck maker MAN's IAA preview event, reports John Challen

MAN Truck & Bus highlighted what is expected from the current vehicle line-up – such as a revised TG range – and how engineering and functional improvements will save operators time and money. But the German manufacturer also focused on what is to come in the future: specifically in terms of electromobility, digitisation and autonomous vehicles.

The general consensus was that MAN has accepted electric drive as the way forward for trucks. Visitors to the IAA in September (Hall 12, B14; FG T65, V63 and V68) can expect to see an all-electric distribution truck – the MAN eTGM – and the eTGE, an electric version of the MAN panel van based on the Volkswagen Transporter.

In other vehicle development news, away from electrics and already out in the field (on a German motorway, to be specific) is MAN's latest platooning trial. It involves German logistics provider DB Schenker and the Hochschule Fresenius University of Applied Sciences, both of whom are – together with MAN – part of the world's first networked real-world

truck convoy. The trio are key members of a trial that has been running since June, where two networked trucks travel a 145km stretch of the A9 highway between DB Schenker's office in Neufahrn and Nuremberg.

The trucks ran empty until early August, but are now making up to three routine logistics trips laden with part loads – predominantly of machine parts, drinks, or paper. The pilot project is government-funded to the tune of around €2 million, and will run until January 2019. At that time further decisions will be made about how to further develop platooning and autonomous driving.

Two trucks are connected thanks to a combination of an ITS G5 antenna, camera, LIDAR, radar and bespoke steering system. A WLAN vehicle communication unit enables the continuous exchange of information relating to speed, acceleration, braking, position and the condition of the platoon. The lead truck asks to connect to the one at the rear when at a close, but safe, distance behind. Once 'connected', the distance is maintained,

enabling advantages in aerodynamics and therefore fuel economy to be gained. As well as delivering goods, another goal of the project is to find insights into the social acceptance of networked driving as well as what the company calls 'transport policy and infrastructural prerequisites'.

Peter Strauss, technical coordinator and project leader in platooning at MAN, stated: "The networking system we have here has been a major step, because we have been able to assess the reliability of the system in a third party logistics network. We've had to do a lot of engineering on safety, reliability, and also developed a training programme for the drivers. We have made a big step in a short space of time."

Strauss said that although MAN might have a project update in time for IAA, full results will only be released at the conclusion of the project. He also adds that there are no current plans to include extra vehicles in the platoon. He explained: "The route we are operating on already existed, so there is a certain amount of freight that naturally fits two vehicles." **TE**