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President
Michael Sweetmore EngTech MSOE MIRTE LCGI
Chief Executive
Bruce McGill

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Registered Office
22 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PR
Tel: 020 7630 1111
Fax: 020 7630 6677
Email: soe@soe.org.uk
www.soe.org.uk

Editor
Will Dalrymple
Email: will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com

Contributing Editors
Steve Banner, John Challen,
Toby Clark, Laura Cork, Dan Gilkes,
Peter Shakespeare, Richard Simpson,
Chris Tindall, Lucy Radley, Brian Wall

Art Editor
Chris Charles

Production Manager
Nicki McKenna
Email: nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com

Advertisement Manager
Craig Molloy
Email: craig.molloy@markallengroup.com
Tel: 01322 221144

Publisher
Jon Benson

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Destination unknown

Electric vehicles were the major theme at both of the season's bus exhibitions: Coach & Bus (pp22-23) and Busworld (pp10-11). Driven by government restrictions on diesel vehicles in urban areas to help improve air quality, many manufacturers are previewing new models of battery-powered vehicles.

Outside of London, however, the regulatory picture is complicated. As each local authority can set its own rules, not every low-emission zone is created equal. Although some are indeed setting up zero-emission zones, even those are unlikely to spread as wide as London's. Many air quality zones do not penalise diesels, provided they comply with Euro VI standards.

At the moment, full-electric vehicles remain uncommon, expensive to buy, limited in range, and difficult to integrate into fleet operations. For all of these reasons, a full-electric future is not necessarily the destiny of even the most electricity-friendly applications, such as urban buses and distribution trucks - not to speak of haulage.

Two other low-carbon alternatives, both available now, are profiled in this issue. One is gas powertrains (pp43-45). Although offering little carbon footprint reduction in its fossil fuel form than diesel, methane (CNG) gas engines do emit less air pollution that is harmful to people. Some CV and bus operators, such as in Reading, Nottingham and Bristol, have taken on significant gas fleets.

The other is hybrid powertrains (they were also covered last month: see www.is.gd/reguhu). BAE Systems' hybrid electric powertrain platform for buses, which does include a diesel engine, can operate engine-off to various extents, depending on the model's capacities. Its operation in Brighton is highlighted, pp26-27.

As full-electric vehicle models from the major manufacturers come to market in the next few years, it will be interesting to see whether they can compete with solutions like these.

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Will Dalrymple
Editor