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Chandigarh, February 18, 2010

First Published: 14:37 IST(18/2/2010)
Last Updated: 14:39 IST(18/2/2010)

After Heathrow, Pod Cars may well hit the Millennium City

It may well be the answer to reducing travel time in growing traffic snarls of our metros. The ULTra Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) system or Pod Car, a battery powered vehicle running on an elevated guide way is sure to fire the imagination of urban and road transport planners in the country looking for green transport solutions.

The ULTra PRT system designed and developed by a British company, Advanced Transport Systems (ATS) Ltd will make its debut at London's Heathrow airport sometime later this year. The Haryana government has shown interest in this futuristic transport system for millennium city Gurgaon. In fact, the Indian partner of ATS, Fairwood made a presentation before Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and top government officials in December.

Financial Commissioner and Principal Secretary, Transport and Civil Aviation, Sameer Mathur said that the state government has now asked the company to provide comprehensive details regarding the technology used in operating ULTra PRT, it's performance parameters and safety aspects. "Definitely it is an interesting concept and we would be open to it. Though it has not been tried and tested at a full scale yet, ULTra PRT is a pretty futuristic thing," he said.

Says Transport Commissioner, Anand Mohan Sharan: "It is an environment friendly system and a green solution to congestion caused by vehicles used for local commuting. The pod car in fact is like a personal cab which is demand responsive to users and transports them anywhere within the track network directly and without any stops. Stations are off line allowing the pods to by pass them, thus reducing the travel time."

The ULTra PRT system operates on a dedicated one way guide way network and provides excellent operational flexibility. The automated pods provides for flexible routing allowing closer point to point travel. Then there are no intermediate stops as stations are located on side tracks so that through traffic can bypass vehicles picking up or dropping off passengers. The PRT stations can be integrated into buildings facilitating a direct entry into malls, hotels and offices. For instance the first of its kind commercial PRT system coming up at Heathrow comprises four kilometers of guide way, linking one station in Terminal 5 to two remote stations in the business car park.

What is an ULTra PRT or a Pod Car?

It is a driverless, battery operated vehicle with central control system and is laser guided. Having a seating capacity of 4-6 persons it will have a maximum speed of about 40 kilometres per hour. Fitted with LCD displays and air-conditioning, the Pod Car has a small turning radius of 5 metres and ability to negotiate high gradients. It weighs about 800 kilograms and has bi parting wide opening doors on both sides.

What is its operating methodology?

Empty Pods are queued up off-line at stations. Passengers can access the Pods using swipe cards. The destinations are programmed into a central console on platform. When the passengers key-in the destination details, the Pod selects the most economical route for specific destination. The ULTra PRT can be integrated with an existing transport system and can provide feeder services to an mass transport system.

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