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Claus Sauter, Bioenergy Expert, Founder & CEO of VERBIO AG addresses current issues of (bio)energy, energy security and (green) mobility

## Column

### Berlin: Avanti Dilettanti

*This really does take some beating. While the largest bus fleet in the German-speaking countries has 1,400 diesel buses on the roads of Berlin every day, our politicians are discussing a ban on private diesel passenger vehicles. The Berlin senate is reacting and is finally getting around to renewing the bus fleet, parts of which are 15 years old. To do this they will turn to electric power, as they announced in September. And how? By ordering 30 electric buses. This is nothing but a very expensive ecological fig leaf, with which Berlin is trying to give itself a clean image. It completely ignores the real facts of how to provide the metropolis with a clean and affordable public transport system.*

Many major cities in Germany continue to exceed the limits for fine-particle and nitrogen oxide pollution. It is not only the drivers of private passenger vehicles that are responsible for the quality of the city's air. Take a look at the largest city bus network in the German-speaking countries: Berlin. In the days of Dieseltgate the age of the bus fleet, operated by the Berlin City Transport Authority (Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe – BVG), should be a wake-up call: the city's oldest buses date back to 2002. The investment backlog in the public sector is preventing a system of rolling renewals. As a result there are currently far too many vehicles on the roads which are in the EURO 3 emissions category, and these continue to drive up nitrogen oxide pollution levels.

The answer is close, you might think. Since December 2016 the Senate Department for the Environment, Transport and Climate Protection has been under the control of the Green party and the department is managed by Regine Günther, who is the former Director General of Policy and Climate at the World Wildlife Fund. And note the fact that, at the beginning of 2017, Berlin was ready with a concept which would provide it with an environmentally friendly city bus fleet. The solution was conversion to CNG buses, as this type of vehicle is already available on a mass produced basis, and meets the EURO 6 emission regulations with significantly lower nitrogen oxide values without any expensive retrofit work. At the end of February the planning was on target.

Then the issue disappeared in some kind of summer lethargy, until Regine Günther suddenly waded into one of the election issues by throwing all plans overboard in September with a switch to electro mobility. “Electro mobility is the future and we are starting now,” she said, and spoke of acquiring 30 (!) electric buses. This is just a drop in the ocean! What will happen with the remaining 1,370 diesel buses? A loud silence. No one is challenging this, aside from the fact that the environmental balance of the electric buses is rather doubtful.

Let's look at the figures. The addition cost of an electric bus compared to a diesel bus is EUR 600,000 – that means a total of EUR 18 million for 30 battery powered vehicles. One CNG bus has an additional cost of only EUR 30,000. So with the same budget you could buy 600 CNG buses, reducing the size of the diesel fleet by a huge amount in one hit.

This would bring a host of advantages: The CNG technology used in buses has been in mass production for many years. The vehicles are reliable, which is not something that can be said about electric buses at the moment. That is a very important issue in providing a disruption-free and punctual local public transport system for a city with millions of inhabitants.

CNG power is also significantly better for the environment. Despite using an internal combustion engine, the use of CNG fuel reduces fine-particle and nitrogen oxide pollution by more than 90 percent compared to the use of diesel engines. If the CNG buses were powered with biomethane made from waste materials (for example, straw – verbiogas) they would in addition result in CO<sub>2</sub> savings of up to 90 percent. This could only be matched by electricity-powered vehicles if the electricity they use was generated from 100 percent renewable sources. Currently, only around 30 percent of electricity used in Germany is generated from renewable sources.

However, there are German cities who demonstrate better ways of doing this. Take Augsburg, for example. For the last five years the city's entire fleet of 100 buses has been powered using CNG and 100 percent biomethane from VERBIO – and as a result the fleet is almost completely CO<sub>2</sub> neutral. A small Bavarian town is more environmentally advanced than our capital city – and as a result it is saving money! The capital has taken to wearing a fig leaf for election purposes, fully ignoring the success story in Augsburg.

In the same way Regine Günther has ignored my requests for dialogue on many occasions. Nevertheless I have an attractive offer for Berliners: verbiogas from 100 percent straw, available on better terms than they can achieve using standard diesel buses. Watch out Berlin! Dialogue helps, when the facts are on the table and when people are prepared to do bit of straight-talking!

The BVG advertises using the slogan “Because we love you” – and yet it is constantly and deliberately polluting the Berlin air. Senator Günther and Mayor Müller need to finally acknowledge these indisputable facts. Therefore I am making a call for a proper declaration of love to the city: convert to CNG mobility!

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