

First autonomous vehicle on German public roads

SA self-driving bus service operated by Deutsche Bahn began carrying passengers in Bad Birnbach, Bavaria, today • Digitalisation offers outstanding opportunities for local public transport in rural areas.

(Bad Birnbach, April 25, 2018) The red-and-white mini-bus glides silently through the streets of the spa town of Bad Birnbach in Lower-Bavaria. Drivers and pedestrians meet up with an electric bus that is not only quiet and environmentally friendly. It also has no driver, and neither a steering wheel nor an accelerator pedal. Its only concession to normality is an operator who is prepared to intervene if necessary. The vehicle negotiates the 700-metre route from the town centre to the thermal baths on public roads. DB joined forces with the Rottal-Inn rural district, the vehicle developer EasyMile, TÜV Süd and market town of Bad Birnbach to launch Germany's first autonomous public bus service. In 2018, the bus will also connect the town centre with the station.

'We have just driven into a new era of fully-automated public transport', says Dr. Richard Lutz, CEO of Deutsche Bahn, after the premiere. 'This is clear proof that our pioneering spirit is still alive – as it was 180 years ago, when Germany's first railway was opened between Nuremberg and Fürth. We are the first concern in Germany to bring autonomous vehicles to the streets as part of a local public transport system. Our aim is to further strengthen connectivity between road and rail and, in turn, to enable personal mobility in rural as well as urban areas without the need for private cars.'

'For the Rottal-Inn rural district, the autonomous bus is a lighthouse project that can generate real signals', says District Administrator Michael Fahmüller. 'Particularly in a rural region like ours, many people still depend completely on their cars. But now, since the autonomous bus has begun to regularly carry passengers in Bad Birnbach, this is a visible sign that points the way to future mobility and the flexibilisation of public transport, especially in rural areas. We are proud to have been able to play such a pioneering role.'

In the future, DB will not only carry its customers directly to their destinations with driverless vehicles on fixed routes but will also pick up and set down passengers 'on demand'. These demand responsive transportation options – with and without drivers – will be bundled together by DB in a new brand by the name of 'ioki'.