



Press release

Pioneering project KIRA starts with autonomous vehicles for public transport

Autonomous vehicles with Level 4 begin first test drives · Test operation is now underway in the Rhine-Main region

(Hofheim/Berlin, 25. June 2024) A pioneering project in public transport is hitting the road: The first vehicle with Level 4 automation is under way in normal road traffic in the city of Darmstadt and the district of Offenbach. Level 4 means that the shuttles move autonomously, i.e. effectively driverless, within a defined area. A particularly special feature: for the first time, the vehicle is responsible for every decision on all driving manoeuvres. During the test drives, there will always be a safety driver sitting behind the wheel of the KIRA shuttles.

The Federal Motor Transport Authority (Kraftfahrtbundesamt) has issued the corresponding permit for the Level 4 test drives. The project name KIRA stands for "AI-based regular operation of autonomous on-demand transport services". Project principals are Deutsche Bahn (DB) and the Rhine/Main Regional Transport Association (RMV).

Soon, a total of six autonomous shuttles will gradually begin operation in parts of the city of Darmstadt and the district of Offenbach. They will operate within the service areas of the regional transport companies HEAG mobilo and Kreisverkehrsgesellschaft Offenbach (kvgOF). For now, passengers are not permitted to ride in the KIRA shuttle. Interested residents can later apply to be test riders and book the shuttles on-demand via a dedicated app.

KIRA is the first project in Germany to test autonomous vehicles for public transport at level 4 automation. All the vehicle's driving manoeuvres are monitored by Technical Supervision staff. The technology makes it possible to safely participate at normal speeds in regular road traffic. The KIRA shuttles' first drives will focus primarily on testing Mobileye's installed self-driving system. During this process, the system will check the map data of the operating area and ensure that all data points along the road are correct.

Autonomous on-demand driving services are intended to make public transport more flexible and attractive. Shuttles that can be ordered as needed ("on-demand") can provide nationwide mobility, especially in rural areas. In the future, such service can be provided everywhere autonomously and thus without on-board personnel. The mobility transition envisages intelligent networking of various modes of transport to enable seamless door-to-door mobility that is as flexible as your own car.

The operator of the autonomous vehicles is DB Regio Bus Mitte. The DB company ioki provides the software for booking and route planning; ioki also integrates the software



Press release

components of the various technology partners. As a further partner, Mobileye is providing the software and hardware for the autonomous driving system. The test and implementation phase is initially scheduled to run until the end of 2024. An extension is planned. The KIRA research project is financially supported by the Federal Ministry of Digital and Transport (BMDV) with a total of around 2.2 million euros and by the state of Hesse.

Further information about the project and the technology can be found at www.kira-autonom.com