

## Why ALD Automotive is getting into Smart Cities

11 July 2019 / Theme(s): All articles, New Mobility



**Smart Cities – everyone is talking about them, but nobody knows exactly what they are. And that, says Stéphane Renie, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at ALD, is a good thing. “All options are on the table. The question is: What do we want Smart Cities to do? And it’s up to us to find the answer.**

The most common definition of what constitutes a Smart City also is the vaguest one: ‘a city that incorporates new technologies in order to integrate and improve the delivery of services’. Mobility usually is a key element – in tandem with urban planning, traffic management and smarter provision of utilities.

### **‘Transport brains’**

It’s perhaps telling that despite all the talk about Smart Cities, there really isn’t a city yet anywhere on the planet that fits the definition. “Singapore likes to position itself as one, and the fact that it’s literally a city-state makes unified planning around housing, traffic and urban development much easier. But the main way in which Smart Cities are emerging is via pilot projects that are limited in both geography and scope.”

Involving driverless cars, on-demand shuttles, multimodal transport, smartgrids and more, examples from all over the world show the elasticity of the Smart City concept: “China is incredibly engaged. Its Smart City initiatives are very tech-oriented, and mostly about managing flows of traffic and people,” says Mr Renie.

“These ‘transport brains’ are developed centrally by China’s giant tech companies. In Sao Paulo, on the other hand, it’s all about quality of life and inclusion. Northern European initiatives tend to have a major green component. Some are more business-oriented.”

### **Bigger picture**

Mindset is important, agrees Didier Blocus, Head of New Mobility at ALD Automotive France. “Smart Cities is a buzzword, and it’s all about technology. But maybe the way to smarter cities is using less technology.” Or about using the right technology in the right place: “The Smart Cities of the near future will likely restrict access by diesel and petrol cars. So our provision of EVs to our customers is part of that bigger picture.”

“That’s why we’re also considering hydrogen – which we’re already testing in a few pilot projects with selected customers. That’s what we want to do, at the start of this era of Smart Cities: help our customers find the better solution,” says Mr Blocus.

### **From A to B**

But ALD Automotive is not just entering the Smart City space because it’s trendy. It’s going there because it’s the natural extension of its core business – moving people from A to B.

“We notice this a lot when talking to new players, whether they’re offering car sharing or e-scooters: they all have the same problem to solve – how to finance and manage a vehicle fleet,” says Mr Blocus.

“Even in the new mobility ecosystem, people will still need to be moved by “stuff” on wheels. And ALD Automotive has a lot of legitimacy in that area,” Mr Renie chips in.

### **Key components**

In order to make the most of that advantage, ALD Automotive is already studying the issues that will determine if, when and how Smart Cities will become a success.

One of the key components of smooth Smart City management is data sharing – between companies that are often more competitive and cooperative, and with governments, raising all kinds of privacy and fair use issues. It’s an issue with many thorns but as yet no universally agreed solution.

A second component is electrification – an important lever in creating the sharing economy and moving towards Mobility as a Service (MaaS). Having developed a corporate car sharing offer and with its knowledge EV management, ALD Automotive has already got a good head start.

A third one is partnering – finding the right corporate and municipal players in order to advance Smart City development. “We’ll be running a lot of tests and pilot projects in the coming years, to test and learn together with our partners to determine, for example, who should be managing what and who should be aggregating with whom,” Mr Blocus reveals.

### **Social inclusion**

ALD Automotive clearly recognizes its role as a facilitator for Smart City ecosystems as a player with the knowledge, the will and the drive to succeed. So, what – beyond building partnerships, developing pilots and increasing its expertise – will ALD Automotive be focusing on?

“Our main responsibility is to contribute to the great project of making our cities more liveable and sustainable,” says Stéphane Renie. “Smart Cities means greener cars, better air quality – but also social inclusion: the product offering must not be aimed at only the fortunate few, but at the greatest possible group of users.”