# May Mobility set to expand operations with high-capacity electric minibuses



May Mobility, a micro autonomous transit company headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is set to expand its operations by introducing high-capacity electric minibuses into its fleet. The announcement was made at the CES Show in Las Vegas on Tuesday, where they unveiled their partnership with Italian manufacturer Tecnobus. This strategic move aims to enhance their competitive stance against Waymo, the leading autonomous vehicle company owned by Google parent company Alphabet Inc.

The new Tecnobus vehicles will significantly increase the capacity of May Mobility's operational fleet. Currently utilising smaller Toyota Sienna minivans, the newly introduced minibuses are designed to accommodate up to 30 passengers and can also support multiple wheelchairs—a notable feature for inclusive transit solutions.

In a discussion with Forbes, Edwin Olson, co-founder and CEO of May Mobility, highlighted the technological advancements integrated into these electric vehicles. He stated, “It's an EV platform. It's got a rapid battery changing capability, so you can swap the battery out in three minutes, which solves a lot of the asset utilization problem that you'd otherwise get with EVs.” This innovation may enhance the efficiency and appeal of autonomous transit services.

The collaboration was further elaborated by Tecnobus CEO Paolo Marini, who emphasised the synergy between their electric mobility expertise and May Mobility’s advancements in autonomous technology. “This collaboration combines Tecnobus’ electric mobility expertise with May Mobility’s cutting-edge autonomy to deliver a transformative transit solution,” he noted.

Founded in 2017, May Mobility has been operational in the US and Japan, primarily deploying driverless transit fleets with safety drivers present. However, they recently rolled out services without backup drivers in locations such as Sun City, Arizona, and Ann Arbor, achieving a record of no safety incidents reported thus far.

Looking ahead, Olson revealed plans to launch the Tecnobus service within the next year, specifically targeting 2026, although he refrained from disclosing the specific markets slated for this rollout. With the recent exit of General Motors from the autonomous transit sector and the withdrawal of financial support for its Cruise automation division, Olson believes that May Mobility is well-positioned to capitalize on the changing landscape, with Waymo remaining their primary competitor.

He remarked on the evolving competitive environment, stating, “With Cruise exiting the market, the autonomous transit business is basically down to Waymo and May in the United States which is an amazing turn of events that I don't think anyone would have guessed just a few years ago.” Olson also expressed a sense of determination to close the competitive gap with Waymo during the growth of their own operations.

Central to May Mobility's strategy is their Multi-Policy Decision Making (MPDM) technology, a patented system that aids the vehicles in navigating through complex traffic and operational scenarios. Olson articulated that the MPDM system allows for rapid decision-making, weighing multiple policies to ascertain the safest action—essentially conducting a high-tech "tournament" to determine the optimal choice.

The financial viability of shared autonomous transit is under scrutiny, as highlighted in a recent study by McKinsey & Company. This analysis outlines that for shared autonomous mobility to attract riders away from conventional transportation, it must either be less expensive or more convenient, while still enabling profitability for businesses involved along the value chain. Current operating costs are noted at approximately $8.20 per vehicle mile for typical urban settings, although projections indicate this could decrease to around $1.30 per mile by 2035 under favourable conditions.

Regarding public perception, the McKinsey study from early January 2024 noted that safety concerns remain a significant barrier to broader acceptance of autonomous vehicles, with 53% of surveyed consumers citing safety as a primary roadblock. Despite these apprehensions, May Mobility remains confident in their ability to deliver safe and cost-effective transit solutions.

Ultimately, Olson articulated a broader objective for May Mobility, asserting, “We have to out compete personal car ownership.” He underscored the challenges posed by excessive personal vehicle ownership, which contributes to urban congestion and parking issues, emphasising the importance of transitioning drivers to public transit alternatives.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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