

## Autogas is the ideal bridging fuel for sustainable EU road transport

Written by Trevor Morgan on 8 November 2017 in Opinion Plus  
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But policy incentives to take account of its environmental benefits are needed for the market to accelerate, argues Trevor Morgan.



There are now eight million vehicles running on autogas across Europe | *Photo credit: Adobe Stock*

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There's no denying the urgent need to seek out alternatives to conventional automotive fuels.

With the publication of the second part of its mobility package on 8 November, the European Commission proposes a number of measures to increase the efficiency of traditional vehicles while fostering the uptake of alternative fuel vehicles and infrastructure.

The focus of policy attention now is very much on electric vehicles, but there is already a practical,

economic and clean alternative to petrol and diesel in widespread use: autogas.

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Autogas – Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) used by road vehicles – is the most widely used unblended alternative fuel in the European Union. It has been around for many years in most EU countries and consumption is still growing, reaching 5.7 million tonnes in 2016 – around 60 per cent up from 2000.

There are now eight million vehicles running on autogas across Europe. But autogas still makes up just two per cent of total EU road-fuel use, with half of total EU demand concentrated in just four countries – Poland, Italy, Germany and Bulgaria.

There is a strong environmental case for boosting the use of autogas. Studies show that autogas outperforms petrol and diesel, as well as some other alternative fuels, on emissions of noxious, toxic and greenhouse gases.

Autogas emissions are especially low on particulates and nitrogen oxides – a distinct problem with diesel and highlighted during the recent dieselgate scandal.

But a shift in government policy, especially regarding measures aimed at making the fuel more cost-competitive, is needed for the autogas market to really take off.

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Switching to autogas involves buying a factory-built petrol car that can also run on autogas or converting an existing petrol car by installing a kit – a straightforward procedure.

But motorists will only do that if they can quickly recoup the initial cost of around €1000 to €2000, through lower fuel costs. That requires lower taxes on autogas compared with petrol and diesel.

We have just completed a major study of the impact of policy incentives on autogas use based on a survey of 23 countries, including 11 EU member states, on behalf of the World LPG Association and the European LPG Association (AEGPL).

The findings are clear: for the autogas market to flourish, the tax on autogas on an energy-content basis generally has to be at least a third less than that of other fuels.

This is needed to keep the payback period – the time it takes to pay back the upfront cost of switching to autogas – down to under two years.

In Poland, for example, the fuel savings exceed the initial conversion cost after just 17,000 km of driving – about one year for a private car owner and a few months for a taxi or commercial operator.

Financial incentives, in the form of conversion grants or tax credits, can also help. This approach is currently used in Italy, Spain and the UK.

"Autogas is the obvious choice of “bridging fuel” in the transition to a truly sustainable transport system"

In countries where autogas remains small, the role of the government in providing an initial impetus to kick-start the development of demand and supply infrastructure is vital. Even where strong financial incentives exist, autogas use will not necessarily take off until critical market mass is achieved.

Autogas must be widely available and the market must be big enough to support a viable network or properly-trained mechanics to convert and maintain Autogas vehicles. This requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders – vehicle manufacturers and converters, autogas suppliers and governments – in developing the market.

The widespread deployment of battery electric vehicles and other potential zero-emission technologies will undoubtedly form a central pillar of the EU’s long term strategies to curb air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from transport.

But their widespread commercialisation is still several years away. The most practical approach in the short-term to reducing emissions is to encourage people and businesses to switch to cleaner-burning fuels that are already commercially available.

Autogas is the obvious choice of “bridging fuel” in the transition to a truly sustainable transport system. It is essential that European policy makers recognise the major contribution that autogas can make to cleaner mobility when defining strategies and measures over the horizon to 2030.

## **About the author**

Trevor Morgan is Managing Director of Menecon Consulting - an independent UK-based consulting firm specialising in energy and climate strategy, policy and economics

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