

Stagecoach launches bid for Italian market

Megabus expansion continues with launch of new network

COACHES

▶ Stagecoach this week launched a major assault on the Italian express coach market with the introduction of a new network linking 13 cities from a base at Bergamo near Milan.

It will connect Rome, Milan, Florence, Venice, Naples, Turin, Bologna, Verona, Padua, Siena, Genoa, Sarzana (La Spezia) and Pisa with Stagecoach investing almost £8m in a new fleet of 23 vehicles to support the venture.

Stagecoach is creating around 45 jobs initially at a new operating base close to Bergamo. Vehicles will be parked, cleaned and maintained at the base under a partnership with local company

Autoservizi Locatelli.

The company has also opened a second crew base in Florence, with offices in the city's Santa Maria Novella area, where over 50 staff will be located. The majority of the new employees are Italian nationals and are employed on permanent Italian contracts.

The new network was launched by Riccardo Nencini, Italy's deputy minister of infrastructure and transport, who said that the new venture will deliver a new way of travelling in Italy.

"Megabus will connect Italian cities, from the north to the

south, with low fares, giving students, workers and tourists the opportunity to visit our country," said Nencini. "Delivering the possibility for everybody to travel without constraints brings people more freedom and I really thank Megabus for believing in Italy."

The new network will commence on June 24 and an introductory offer will see all tickets priced at one Euro for the first five days of operations.

Meanwhile, German coach competitor MeinFernbus/Flixbus has announced plans for a major expansion of its network across Europe using the Flixbus brand.

The company already connects a handful of European cities with its core German market and has announced plans for a major expansion in France, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium. ■

"I really thank Megabus for believing in Italy"

Riccardo Nencini

WRIGHT OPENS INDIAN FACTORY

Chennai plant has capacity to assemble 1,500 buses

MANUFACTURERS

▶ Wrightbus International has opened a new bus body assembly plant in Chennai, India that has the capacity to build more than 1,500 vehicles each year.

The new assembly plant is based at Daimler's local truck and bus plant and will initially assemble Wrightbus lightweight bus bodies to the Bharat Benz commercial vehicle chassis.

"India is a huge emerging market with massive potential," said Mark Nodder, Wrights Group chairman and chief executive. "The opening of this assembly plant is a proactive step towards international expansion." ■

UITP initiates bus innovation scheme

Second EBSF project to examine vehicle design

VEHICLE DESIGN

▶ UITP, the international public transport association, has launched its new 'European Bus System of the Future 2' project which aims to continue the drive for innovations in bus design.

The three-year project will bring together manufacturers, operators, research institutes and authorities in order to test and evaluate a set of technological solutions to improve the efficiency and

attractiveness of urban bus systems across Europe.

The launch of the scheme, follows on from the first EBSF scheme, which ran between 2008 and 2012. It was the first pan-European project to bring together the continent's leading bus manufacturers.

EBSF 2 will see demonstration projects launched in 12 cities. They will investigate several broad themes, including energy management, vehicle design, IT standards and the interface of the bus with infrastructure. ■

NORFOLK GREEN STRIKE AVERTED

RMT wins recognition rights at Stagecoach firm

TRADE UNIONS

▶ The threat of strike action at Stagecoach-owned bus operator Norfolk Green has been averted after the RMT union won a battle for recognition rights.

Last month the union announced that it would ballot members for industrial action at the operator's King's Lynn depot. It claimed that Stagecoach was refusing union recognition rights, because of a region-wide collective bargaining

"We will abide by any decision by the Central Arbitration Committee"

Andy Campbell

agreement with the Unite union. The RMT's claim for recognition came after a majority of staff working at Norfolk Green joined the union.

However, a Central Arbitration Committee panel has found in favour of the RMT on the matter after a meeting between the two sides where they had agreed to a bargaining unit.

The panel's report added that Stagecoach and the RMT had confirmed the arrangement via an email from the union to the panel's case manager on April 12.

This was confirmed in subsequent correspondence but two weeks later Stagecoach announced management of Norfolk Green would pass to its Stagecoach East subsidiary.

Stagecoach East MD Andy Campbell said that he believed that previous management had not been keen on completing the recognition agreement. "We will abide by any decision by the CAC," he added. ■