

ELEC- TRIFIED

CO₂ emissions generated within the transport sector are to be reduced by around 40 percent by the year 2030. For sustainable mobility to succeed, close cooperation between the energy and automotive industries is essential. Dr. Frank Mastiaux, CEO of energy supplier EnBW, and Dr. Stefan Wolf, CEO of ElringKlinger, discuss similarities and differences on the path to a climate-neutral future.





WHAT DO THE ENERGY TRANSITION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY HAVE IN COMMON?

MASTIAUX — We as EnBW can only stress the need for strategic alliances. We are facing a challenge, particularly in the field of e-mobility, which can only be met if we work together. Only if we consider the energy and transport sectors as a single entity will each be able to make its contribution to achieving its own objectives.

WOLF — In my opinion, change in our industry can only work in close cooperation with the energy sector. There is no point at all in the automotive industry simply rolling out vehicles with alternative drive systems. People actually have to buy such vehicles. And they will only do so if the cars meet their lifestyle and mobility requirements, which includes an adequate charging infrastructure.

MASTIAUX — Improved traffic management is also a key prerequisite for change in the area of mobility. Here we can contribute our experience in the operation of large infrastructures. Simply focusing on recharging points would be a short-sighted approach.

WOLF — Exactly, traffic management will also be a key factor. In addition, however, being able to charge enough electricity at the right time is essential for the success of e-mobility. And this brings us to the issue of grid capacity and the question of who pays for the expansion.

MASTIAUX — Yes, we in the energy sector see it the same way. Fundamentally, the customer must be able to have confidence not only in the vehicle technology but also in the infrastructure. However, setting up a charging infrastructure requires substantial investment in advance and such capital expenditure simply isn't worthwhile at present.

WOLF — The automotive industry is investing considerable amounts. Electric mobility is first and foremost about actually getting fully electric vehicles on the road. The focus is on completely new vehicle concepts.

IS IT SIMILAR FOR FUEL CELL VEHICLES AND HYDROGEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

MASTIAUX — I am convinced that other energy carriers such as hydrogen will play a major role when it comes to future road transport – alongside electricity. But if I understand my colleagues in the car industry correctly, we have not yet reached a point where a fuel cell vehicle would be competitive compared to an electric car.

WOLF — The main advantage of fuel cell technology is that the refueling process can be completed relatively quickly, as was previously the case with fossil fuels. Furthermore, hydrogen filling pumps can be integrated into the existing filling station infrastructure.

MASTIAUX — When I think of fuel cells, the first thing I can imagine is their use in the field of heavy-duty transport, because this segment requires higher energy densities and ranges.

WOLF — From a regional perspective, Asian countries such as Korea and Japan are more advanced. They are relying consistently on fuel cell technology and are looking to have larger fleets – including passenger cars, by the way – on the road by as early as 2030. And in China, our company is already working on more than 20 development projects for fuel cell drives. This is also of benefit to us in Europe when it comes to reaching series production readiness more quickly.

HOW DO YOU CHANNEL YOUR INVESTMENTS IN THIS SITUATION?

WOLF — We invest in technologies for new drive systems, while at the same time drawing on expertise gained from our long-standing business. For example, we produce our bipolar plates for fuel cells on the same machines as our cylinder-head gaskets. And our cell connectors for batteries fitted to electric vehicles are also manufactured with the help of established metal processing methods.

MASTIAUX — Essentially, we must all abandon the idea that a specific business model is future-proof in any way. This poses quite a challenge for the energy industry due to the substantial investments involved. Building a marine wind farm can quickly add up to two billion euros. We're therefore trying to pursue the right trend and spread the portfolio risk, for example, by investing in renewable energies, in the grid, and in new infrastructure projects that match our expertise.

HAS THE MORE EXTENSIVE DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE DRIVEN CHANGE IN YOUR RESPECTIVE SECTORS?

MASTIAUX — We conduct surveys on a regular basis. According to these, a clear majority says that the changeover to renewable energies is the right choice. The issue becomes more problematic when wind farms or power lines are installed in close proximity to people. There is greater resistance in such cases. But in principle, acceptance is still high.

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Dr. Stefan Wolf, CEO of ElringKlinger AG





WOLF — It is similar in our industry. Against the backdrop of climate change, almost everyone is in favor of electric mobility. But at a personal level, people compare the cost of an electric car with that of a vehicle powered by a combustion engine.

MASTIAUX — Ultimately, we are at a point where politics should actually draw up a kind of project plan. Indeed, the year 2050 seems so far away. But if we fail today to present a clear plan that focuses on the ultimate objective and if we do not implement such a plan consistently, we will never achieve our climate targets in this country. Cooperation between the energy and automotive sectors also needs to be much more intensive and systematic.

WOLF — I agree entirely. We are undergoing a process of deep transformation. If we do not succeed in communicating to people that transformation really means change, major social projects such as energy transition and climate-neutral mobility are doomed to fail.

WHAT DOES THIS TRANSFORMATION MEAN FOR YOU PERSONALLY AS A MANAGER?

MASTIAUX — Business models are changing more rapidly than ever before. Therefore, the ability to change becomes a strategic skill. A manager today can no longer say: “I know what the world will look like in ten years’ time.” Instead, managers must champion the idea of adaptability and encourage constant observation. Because your own employees are the ideal scouts for change.

WOLF — In my experience, you can get very far if you not only describe the instance of change to employees but also convey to them that there is the prospect of new responsibilities and secure jobs. Employees who respond positively to this often develop very innovative ideas.

THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY JOHANNES WINTERHAGEN.

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Dr. Frank Mastiaux, CEO of EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG

DR. FRANK MASTIAUX

Dr. Frank Mastiaux was born in Essen in 1964. After completing his doctoral thesis in chemistry, he began his professional career at Veba Oel AG in 1993. On an overseas posting, he worked at CITGO Petroleum Corp in the U.S. Following the merger of Veba Oel AG and ARAL AG, he became Managing Director of ARAL Mineralöl-Vertrieb GmbH. He was then employed in various management positions in the BP Group in London after the Veba Oel/Aral Group was acquired by BP p.l.c. Before joining EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG, he held a number of positions on the Board of Management of the E.ON Group. On October 1, 2012, Dr. Frank Mastiaux was appointed the Chairman of the Board of Management of EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG.

