

Transport Systems Catapult Media Release PR01-14

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Transport Systems Catapult selects RDM to build self-driving vehicles

Milton Keynes, 12 May – The appearance of self-driving vehicles on the pavements of Milton Keynes moved a step closer to reality on Monday, following the unveiling of Coventry-based RDM Group as the manufacturer of the futuristic LUTZ Pathfinder pods.

RDM were appointed by project managers Transport Systems Catapult (TSC) following an open OJEU tender process which attracted a total of five bids. RDM and TSC will now work together with Oxford University's Mobile Robotics Group (MRG) to create three electric-powered pods that are set to be tested on the pavements of Milton Keynes next year.

“We are absolutely delighted to have won this prestigious project following a very in-depth tendering process,” said RDM Group CEO David Keene. “The LUTZ Pathfinder project represents an opportunity for RDM to showcase our technical abilities in advanced vehicle design, development and build to both a UK and global audience.

“We have invested heavily in attracting the right people with skills in advanced electronics, software development, mobile apps and vehicle engineering and all of these attributes will be brought into play on this project.”

The self-driving pods are part of the TSC's Low Carbon Urban Transport Zone (LUTZ) Pathfinder programme which is studying the feasibility of autonomous and on-demand vehicles. Carrying up to two passengers, and with a top speed of around 12 kilometres per hour (7 m.p.h.), the pavement-based pods are intended to increase the number of mobility options available to the public, while also reducing congestion and carbon emissions.

RDM are scheduled to complete the manufacture of the first pod by the end of this year, allowing the Oxford University robotics experts to install their technology and begin test-track trials in early 2015. Once these trials are completed, the pods will be ready for testing in public on the pavements of Milton Keynes. With safety issues of paramount importance throughout the duration of the assessment programme, the three pods will continue to be manned by trained human operators.

“The LUTZ Pathfinder project will redefine how people think of ‘driving’, and therefore fits in perfectly with our mission to promote UK business growth in the field of intelligent mobility,” said Transport Systems Catapult programme director Neil Fulton. “The appointment of the pods’ manufacturers is obviously a major milestone for the project and I am very happy to welcome RDM on board.”

Following a first “kick-off meeting” with the team from RDM, Oxford MRG project leader Professor Paul Newman also welcomed the announcement.

“The LUTZ project is a great opportunity to showcase UK robotics, identified as one of the UK's great technologies,” Professor Newman said. “Transport is a particularly exciting application for robotics and we look forward to working with the Transport Systems Catapult and RDM on this flagship project and showing how research from UK universities can be turned into compelling public demonstrations.”

Please note that the image of the pods included with this press release is taken from early concept designs and does not represent a final design. Any usage of this images should be accompanied by an explanation that it shows an early concept design.

The Transport Systems Catapult (TSC) is an independent centre for innovation which connects businesses with the UK's research and academic communities. One of seven Catapults created by the Technology Strategy Board, the TSC is driving the UK's global leadership in Intelligent Mobility: the efficient and cost-effective movement of people and goods. Find out more at ts.catapult.org.uk

RDM Group, which celebrates its 21st birthday this year, employs 39 people. As well as providing engineering services to the automotive sector, the group also boasts telematics and meditec divisions which provide cutting edge hardware/software solutions and innovative assisted-living products respectively. For more on RDM Group, visit www.rdmgroup.co.uk or follow @rdm_group_ on twitter.

Founded in 2003 and based in the Information Engineering Building at the Department of Engineering Science, Oxford University's Mobile Robotics Group (MRG) specialises in mobile autonomy with a particular emphasis on perception and understanding of large workspaces. In addition to its work on the pavement-based LUTZ Pathfinder pods, MRG is applying its technology to the separate Oxford RobotCar project – which is working towards the first public demonstration of a low-cost auto-drive navigation system on UK public roads.

Media enquiries relating to the LUTZ Pathfinder project can be addressed to Transport Systems Catapult communications manager Mark Ledsom on 07506 137 680, or via mark.ledsom@ts.catapult.org.uk

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