

# U.K. town to deploy driverless pods to replace busses

November 5 2013, by Bob Yirka

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(Phys.org) —Milton Keynes, a town north of London, has announced that it will be deploying 100 driverless pods (officially known as ULTra PRT transport pods) as a public transportation system. A similar system has been running for two years at Heathrow airport. The plan is to have the system up and running by 2015, with a full rollout by 2017. The move marks the first time that self-driving vehicles will be allowed to

run on public roads in that country.

The [pods](#) look like very small metro rail cars, with sliding doors for exit and entry. Passengers can call (and pay £2 per trip) for a pod using their smartphone. The pods travel using rubber wheels on a special roadway, not a track, between curbs that help in guidance. Each pod is computer driven by independent onboard systems, though humans ([passengers](#)) can take over if there is a problem. Each can hold up to two people and their luggage and travels just 12mph. Plans call for the pods to carry passengers between the downtown area, the business district and the train station.

The pods are expected to be cleaner, quieter and less expensive than the current bus system—each pod has a battery powered electric motor and is charged at various stations between routes. The project is expected to cost £65 million over the next five years and is part of the British government's initiative to support green technologies. Milton Keynes was chosen as a test site due to its proximity to London, its unusually wide roads and its willingness to embrace new technology. The move has been the next step after the successful implementation of the system first installed at Heathrow airport in 2011 where 4km of track has been dedicated to run 21 of the pods—all without major issues. Officials note the pods have sensors meant to ensure the safety of both passengers and pedestrians.

It is widely believed that if the pods prove to be successful (and safe) in Milton Keynes that the day will come when they will no longer be restricted to their own private lanes, opening the door to general driverless public transportation—a move that may ultimately result in driverless passenger vehicles being sold to the public at large.

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