NTU to have driverless bus shuttle service running campuswide by 2019

SINGAPORE — By the end of next year, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will have a autonomous shuttle service serving the entire campus.

The fully automated, robot-controlled and connected shuttles will have a maximum speed of 40km/h, and will travel at about 10km/h during the ongoing trial period.

The vehicles were introduced to NTU last September as part of a “mobility-as-a-service” trial, which is in collaboration between NTU, SMRT and industrial property developer JTC. JTC’s project aims to integrate multiple modes of transport, including shuttle buses, bike-sharing systems, e-scooters and e-bikes, as well as the autonomous shuttle into a single mobility platform called “Ono-juno”, developed by mobilityX, an SMRT-led funded start-up.

The pilot run of the smartphone mobile application for Ono-juno began around last August, and it has been used by more than 1,000 rides by e-scooter riders, commuters getting around NTU and industrial property developer JTC’s CleanTech Park, which is located next to the university.

The IDEAL SPEED

Speaking to TODAY, NTU students said that they found the Ono-juno app useful in offering them different modes of transport around the campus, especially on odd hours when public transport services have stopped operating. However, they were hopeful towards the prospect of travelling on autonomous vehicles.

First-year business student Wong Pin Lin, 24, said that she says there are “too slow”, and preferred the convenience and speed offered by e-scooters, particularly when she is in a rush.

An NTU spokesman told TODAY that there are plans to increase the speed of the shuttle “for the safety considerations” of passengers and other drivers along the road.

“It’s still undergoing trials, and it’s the purpose of why we are testing it… to find that sweet spot for a speed suitable for the roads,” the spokesman added.

On the latest developments, NTU’s president Subir Suresh said that the university is “as strong as research and development projects, and the entire campus is a hub for research innovations with multiple ongoing projects being tested.”

Among the autonomous vehicle technologies that have been tested since 2012 is electric and autonomous minicabs from French company Navya Arma. NTU’s associate professor with electric vehicle co-creation platform Reach is in January to launch a ultra-fast charging electric shuttle bus in January, and is collaborating with automobile maker Volkswagen to develop “one of the first” fully-electric and autonomous electric minicabs.

Prof Suresh said: “Public transportation plays a critical role in Singapore’s economic growth, in that we are proud to have a hand in shaping the future of Singapore’s public transportation.”

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