NTU, Volvo launch autonomous electric bus

Road users near Nanyang Technological University (NTU) could see a self-driving bus on the road later this year, as autonomous vehicles edge closer to becoming a viable form of transport.

NTU and Swedish firm Volvo have launched a 12m-long autonomous electric bus, which they say is the first in the world of this length and engine type.

The bus, which can fit about 80 people, has gone through multiple tests at the Centre of Excellence for Testing and Research of Autonomous Vehicles – NTU (Cetran), and is now ready for tests in actual traffic conditions.

It is able to travel 25km on a full charge. Through a 300kW fast-charge system from engineering giant ABB, the bus can be charged to full capacity within six minutes.

At the unveiling of the bus yesterday at Cetran, NTU president Subra Suresh said: “This fully autonomous electric bus will play a role in shaping the future of public transport that is safe, efficient, reliable and comfortable for commuters.

“NTU’s Energy Research Institute executive director Subodh Mhaisalkar said the bus is classified to have near Level 4 autonomy when a vehicle can drive by itself but is still manned, while Level 5 is the highest level of autonomy when the vehicle can operate on its own with no one on board.

“NTU-Volvo team hopes to be one of the successful tenderers for the Government’s plans to have autonomous vehicles in Punggol, Tengah and the Jurong Innovation District from 2022 for commuter use.

“Prof Subodh said the team is excited about the potential of the NTU-developed platform.”

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