



Above: The electric shuttle will operate between Heng Mui Keng Terrace and Business Link at 20-minute intervals on weekdays. The service, which is free of charge, will not operate when it rains. Below: At the launch of the shuttle trial at NUS yesterday were (from left) ComfortDelGro chief executive Yang Ban Seng, Incharge Singapore managing director Jasmmine Wong, ComfortDelGro chairman Lim Jit Poh, French Ambassador to Singapore Marc Abensour, NUS president Tan Eng Chye and EasyMile chief operating officer Benoit Perrin. ST PHOTOS: GIN TAY

Driverless shuttle on trial at NUS starts taking passengers



NUSmart shuttle will ply 1.6km route for a year to determine its commercial viability

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An autonomous shuttle service which transport giant ComfortDelGro has been testing at the National University of Singapore (NUS) campus since May will start taking passengers today.

The so-called NUSmart shuttle – an EZ10 minibus similar to the ones plying in Gardens by the Bay since 2015 – is supplied by France’s EasyMile. It will be plying a 1.6km route between Heng Mui Keng Terrace and Business Link for a year to determine the commercial viability of such a service.

The electric shuttle will operate at 20-minute intervals on weekdays, between 10.20am and 11.20am, and from 2.20pm to 3.20pm.

The service, which is free of charge, will not operate when it rains. The Straits Times understands that currently, most autonomous vehicle sensors are impaired by poor weather conditions.

ComfortDelGro said the service hours will be extended progressively.

The shuttle can carry up to 12 people and – like all autonomous buses here – will have a human operator on board to ensure safety.

The vehicles can operate at speeds of nearly 15kmh – lower

than the speed at which personal mobility devices are allowed to operate on shared paths.

The project is funded by motor firm Incharge Singapore, which distributes Toyotas here.

French Ambassador to Singapore Marc Abensour launched the service yesterday.

ComfortDelGro chief executive Yang Ban Seng said the trial provides an opportunity to observe how passengers respond to an autonomous vehicle. “The operational experience gained will also be invaluable as we prepare for a future where autonomous and artificial intelligence become an integral part of our daily commute,” he said.

ComfortDelGro, through its subsidiary SBS Transit, is also taking part in two other similar trials on Sentosa and Jurong Island.

Meanwhile, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Swedish

vehicle maker Volvo are expected to launch a full-size autonomous bus service at the NTU campus later this year. The full-size Volvo electric bus has been on trial since March.

Elsewhere, a consortium led by ST Kinetics expects to roll out a similar passenger service as early as October next year.

These electric buses will also need to have a driver on board, as they are Level 4 autonomous vehicles – short of the Level 5 which requires no human intervention.

Waymo of the United States, arguably a world leader in autonomous vehicle technology, has been operating fully driverless shuttles in Arizona for over a year now. But it has reportedly been putting drivers back at the wheel after a number of incidents.

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Number of people the shuttle can carry. It will have a human operator on board to ensure safety.

15kmh

The shuttle can operate at nearly this speed – lower than the speed at which personal mobility devices may operate on shared paths.