

Brussels hydrogen energy storage

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With the "Clean Hydrogen Coastline" project, EWE aims to integrate 370 megawatts of generation capacity, along with the corresponding storage of green hydrogen in underground salt caverns, into the energy supply system in the initial phase. The hydrogen – some of which will be generated by offshore power – will be used for a range of purposes including carbon-neutral steel production, the chemical industry and power plants. The project can also lay the groundwork for the operation of hydrogen-powered utility vehicles. Optimisation of the gas networks for the transportation of hydrogen in the north-west would make it possible to connect up networks used to transport the green gas in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

Airbus, BMW and Michelin are among 11 companies set to receive millions in public subsidy to develop low-carbon hydrogen technology after EU competition officials approved a whopping package of state aid for an "important project of common European interest" (IPCEI).

The Hy2Move project, which as its name implies is intended to develop transport fuels, was prepared jointly by Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain, who requested an exemption from single market rules that normally prohibit national subsidies.

It is hoped the state aid will be matched by EUR3.3bn in private sector investment into projects such as developing fuel cells sufficiently powerful for use in ships and trains, and lightweight hydrogen tanks that can safely store the explosive gas for use as an aviation fuel.

Although it named the companies involved - also including smaller firms such as Slovak light aircraft maker Tomark and Estonian energy storage firm Skeleton - the Commission said it was unable to reveal details of the specific projects for which state aid has been approved until it has agreed "on any confidential business secrets that need to be removed".

Hy2Move is the fourth green hydrogen-related IPCEI to be approved after projects related to technology development, new real-world applications and infrastructure, and brings the total approved state subsidies to EUR18.9bn.

Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission vice-president responsible for competition policy, said hydrogen could help decarbonise transport, but that up-front investment could be "risky for one state or one company alone". She stressed that the anticipated private sector investment was a concrete figure based on calls for expressions of interest and agreements within the member states concerned, and not merely an expression of hope.

The upsurge of attention to hydrogen as a potential solution for decarbonising transport and heavy industry has led to talk of "hydrogen hype", and even Commission officials have expressed doubts about meeting the 2030 annual production target of 10 million tonnes of green hydrogen.

Under a recently adopted package of gas market rules, the European Commission has yet to develop legal criteria for "low-carbon hydrogen", which NGOs warned last month must be robust enough to ensure "blue" hydrogen made from natural gas is a genuinely climate friendly, and not merely a means of prolonging demand for the fossil fuel.

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