StreetScooter e-vehicles are already used extensively by the company's owner, Deutsche Post DHL Group

Henk International Managing Director Ludwig Henk was among a group of company representatives invited to try out the e-vehicle at StreetScooter's private test facility near Aachen

Henk goes electric

Henk International is taking significant steps towards adopting e-transport, having secured an electrically-powered commercial vehicle for a 'real world' trial during 2018.

'Our reasons are a healthy mix of the operational and the ideological,' explained Manuela Henk, Managing Director. 'On one hand, we have to be prepared for future restrictions on diesel vehicles; on the other, we want to offer our services as ecologically as possible. Protection of the environment is part of our corporate philosophy and is something we take seriously.'

The operational threats are all too real, particularly for a business located in Düsseldorf, in Germany's Ruhr Valley industrial heartland. This city, like neighbouring Cologne and Essen, is notorious for heavy traffic, congestion and high emission levels.

'We have to make a realistic assessment of the future of working in the transport sector in our area of Germany,' she said. 'Low emission zones have already been implemented in many cities, while a general ban on diesel vehicles is probably the next step.

'This would hit the transport business hard, given our current reliance on diesel power. At the moment, we send around 45 vehicles into the surrounding cities every day. We need to be prepared for any bans or restrictions and we do not want to have to react at short notice. By starting with electric vehicles now, we have the chance to learn, gain experience and adapt.'

Fortunately for Henk International, the company did not have to cast the net too far in order to find support for its new initiative. The Affiliate is working with e-vehicle specialist StreetScooter, based in nearby Aachen, to build its fleet.

> 'Low emission zones have already been implemented in many cities, while a general ban on diesel vehicles is probably the next step'

'Part of our corporate philosophy is to innovate, so we are engaged in the development of a vehicle specification that could become a standard for our industry,' Manuela Henk explained. 'The e-truck manufacturer StreetScooter provides the basic vehicle, while another company builds the body to our specifications. These are designed to enable 'our' e-truck to meet the particular requirements of moving service providers.'

This new, greener approach to vehicles even extends to the electricity that will power them. She added: 'Our new facility, which is currently under construction, will be 100 per cent self-sufficient and totally independent of external energy sources. The electric vehicles will form part of this broader concept to save natural resources.'

Henk International's strategy is to build its e-fleet in stages. This year sees the test truck, plus an electric pool car, put through their paces; then from 2019 to 2022 the plan is to increase the share of electric cars in the fleet to around 30 per cent of the total, while also going for a 25 per cent electric share among the operational fleet. The latter will be restricted to small and medium sized vehicles with a load capacity of 12-15m³, since long haul e-trucks with greater ranges have yet to hit the commercial market.

'At the moment, the rollout will be based on replacing older vehicles,' Manuela Henk noted. 'The most recent vehicles we've taken delivery of are leased for three years for exactly that reason – we can return them after three years and replace them with electric trucks.

'We're trying to get ahead of the game, but this is something that all European movers are going to have to face up to. Fossil fuel powered trucks are going to be banned from entering many city zones and that means e-vehicles will have to be deployed when making shuttle services, or there'll be no way to get containers to clients' residences,' she concluded.