THE BUCKMINSTER FULLER CHALLENGE 2009

Jury Statement on the Winner of the 2009 Buckminster Fuller Challenge

Sustainable Personal Mobility and Mobility-on-Demand Systems (SPM/MoD), submitted by an interdisciplinary student team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab (MIT) has been selected as the winner of the 2009 Buckminster Fuller Challenge. In the opinion of this jury, the project best represents the comprehensive, anticipatory approach to design pioneered by R. Buckminster Fuller – it is a, bold, visionary idea and beautifully reflects the spirit of the Buckminster Fuller Challenge.

Given the nature of the crises we are facing, from climate change to economic collapse, what is important is to demonstrate that this approach to design and problem solving – while always thinking big – has the potential to bring about changes in the near-term. This project is a perfect example of the kind of radical, transformative change that is possible when we reconceive the old ways of doing things and take a systems-based approach to design.

SPM/MoD isn't just about the design of these lightweight, highly efficient, electric vehicles, it is about inserting that technological innovation into the social and cultural environment and designing an intuitive system within which they function. The technological innovation embodied in these vehicles is just one piece of a larger system design which addresses issues from pollution, to congestion, to urban space, to economics, to energy use, to the very idea of personal transportation and what that means in a world with nearly seven billion inhabitants. It truly is – in the Bucky tradition – a transformative solution rather than an isolated piece of technology.

Three innovative new vehicles are at the core of the concept, the CityCar, the RoboScooter, and the GreenWheel bicycle. While the aesthetics of the CityCar rival that of an upscale vehicle and it may be tempting to assume that this project is targeted to the privileged few, the strategy is multifaceted and has been designed to adapt and scale, making it applicable from New York City to Taipei to Lagos. The RoboScooter and the GreenWheel Bicycle offer pollution-free, affordable mobility alternatives just as well-suited to the world's largest most cosmopolitan cities as they are to less developed areas that currently rely on dirty and dangerous means of transportation – even as millions of drivers are being added to the roads every day. The adoption of this system by the rapidly developing mega-cities of the would allow them to 'leap-frog' past the internal combustion engine and the legacy technologies of the developed world and chart a new course of economic development and infrastructure design based on clean, efficient, sustainable transportation, accessible to all.

We can't wait for our supplies of fossil fuels to be exhausted or for electric cars to become more affordable, we have to rethink the very concept of personal mobility now and this project provides a roadmap to get us there. We are proud to award the 2009 Buckminster Fuller Challenge prize to this project and the incredible team of students who submitted it.

The 2009 Buckminster Fuller Challenge Jury

Adam Bly	Bill Browning	Jamais Cascio
Edie Farwell	Helena Norberg-Hodge	John and Nancy Jack Todd
Greg Watson		