

Brazil Ready to Adopt European Light Rail Trains

Contributed by Alana Gandra
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Brazil may soon produce part of the system known as Light Rail Vehicle (VLT, acronym in Portuguese for Veículo Leve sobre Trilhos) using international technology, according to the engineer of the Brazilian Company of Urban Trains (CBTU), Sylvio César dos Santos.

The VLT is a type of sophisticated high-tech streetcar that is silent and air-conditioned. It may move either over rails or along cars and buses in the urban traffic.

It is already used in Europe and Asia. The initial idea is to implement it in the cities of the Northeast region of Brazil.

The engineer affirmed that Brazil still does not have the technology to produce this type of modern streetcar. The project is being carried out by the CBTU with the support of the Brazilian Development Bank, BNDES.

According to Santos, the VLT could easily be adapted to operate as a regional train, which the BNDES is interested in subsidizing, because it evaluates that the country has a strong need for public transportation of medium to high capacity.

Santos added that with the support of the BNDES, the national metrorail industry could experience the same expansion the aviation industry did, when Brazilian company EMBRAER became a great exporter of airplanes, renowned in South America.

In addition to solving traffic problems, Santos said that VLT main advantages include the fact that it presents low noise emission levels and that it is less pollutant than traditional urban vehicles. VLT may be powered by diesel, biodiesel, natural gas, and electricity.

A VLT unit costs 800 thousand euros (US\$ 958,000) in Europe and Asia. Its configuration depends on the demand and the number of passengers it will handle.

Santos estimates this cost can be highly reduced by manufacturing part of the vehicles in Brazil. He also thinks that cost could drop even more if the country developed a vehicle powered by alcohol.

Questions about this type of transportation will be discussed on the roundtable "Standard Train" that the CBTU is organizing on the 13th and 14th of this month, in Maceió, the capital of the northeastern state of Alagoas.

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