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BMW is investing in Embark, a US based maker of new-mobility iPhone and Android apps, as the German premium car maker gears up for the launch of its new i brand vehicles.

Embark apps are designed to help travelers navigate mass transit in major cities. BMW's investment shows car companies realize that personal mobility is evolving into a model incorporating non-automotive forms of transportation.

"BMW and Embark share a common vision for mobility in big cities," said Ulrich Quay, managing director of BMW i Ventures. The investment "will help our two innovative companies explore ways to work together in the coming years, especially in the area of intermodal mobility," he said in a press release.

BMW i Ventures, which is part of the company's i sub-brand, invests in new-mobility services that can help the carmaker expand its traditional business into new areas. These include e-mobility, navigation, parking, car sharing and travel that involves different modes of transportation.

The tie-up, which follows similar ones with apps such as MyCityWay, ParkAtMyHouse and Chargepoint, could also lead to the internationalization of Embark. "The investment will help Embark explore ways to partner with BMW and to expand geographically," said David Hodge, founder and CEO of the company.

BMW intends to launch a range of new, mostly electric, vehicles under the new i brand. The first one, which is scheduled to come to market in 2013, is the i3, a compact city car that will be sold as a plug-in hybrid or a full-electric model. It will be followed by an i8 sports model.

In June BMW opened a dedicated i brand store in London.

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