

Consumer nation

Intelligent Transport Systems have many benefits, but how best to convince the consumer. Shortens journey times? Great. Reduces “historic erosion” of cities and towns? That’s good. Increases commuter convenience? Excellent. Eases congestion? Now you’re talking, says SIMON GOODALE

Since the 1980s when the UK’s infrastructure began to struggle with heavy road use and pollution, and increased urbanisation meant new highway constructions were less viable, Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), which use information and communications technology to monitor and improve road use, have been developed and implemented across the country to provide solutions on both a national and local level.

According to the Department of Trade, ITS helps local authorities battle congestion problems on a number of levels. Firstly, it protects the “historic fabric” of cities and towns eroded by constant or heavy traffic and can improve access to and from workplaces and facilities by reducing private car use and improving public transport services to areas with poor access. Safety can be increased through speed monitoring equipment and CCTV cameras. The Department has also claimed social inclusion is “fostered by helping to meet the transport needs of all social groups” and can lead to a “more efficient and sustainable, intergrated [transport] system”, helping to regenerate local areas without increasing congestion.

There are a huge range of technology-led schemes available, from national road user charging and main route tolling and charging plans, to local town planning requirements such as integrating bus routes with increased park and ride schemes; streamlined car parking access and payment solutions and access to public facilities.

Ignorance is no excuse

While the benefits of ITS are clear - more efficient travel, less pollution and fewer accidents - the high front end capital expenditure often needed for deployment can mean a long wait for the green light, as authorities debate the budget expenditure. Major infrastructure schemes can be delayed by lobbying as consumers fail to understand the medium or long term benefits. Local transport schemes - like the Leeds and Hampshire tram services in 2005, are often dismissed by the government as “uneconomical”.

According to Paul Charmatz, Managing Director of Payzone, a European consumer payments and cash distribution network, the ITS industry needs to focus on developing consumer-friendly technology. He believes there are a number of ways of getting the consumers on board namely, “developing systems that suit their daily lives and cause minimum disruption, ensuring new systems are accessible and innovative and communicating

the benefits of the new systems effectively.”

According to Charmatz, one of the most fundamental purposes behind a successful ITS is ensuring it improves the life of the consumer. Parking is a good example. Whilst finding change for the parking meter combined with a heavy fine for being five minutes late, are well known pet-hates of many drivers, intelligent systems like Payzone’s mParking system in Glasgow, Scotland, provide an appealing solution. Already present in Sydney, Dublin, Edinburgh, Oklahoma City, Las Vegas and New York, the system uses the latest technology to allow consumers to pay on-street parking fees via their mobile phone and a pre-registered credit or debit card. A text reminder of when the parking ticket is due to expire can also be requested. Once details have been registered, consumers can use the service in any city which operates the system.

Providing a range of purchase and payment options together also help ITS appeal to different groups of society. Payzone offers a wide range of ticketing options including e-vouchers, mobile phone ticketing, travel cards, and web ticketing. E-vouchers enable travellers to buy their bus or coach ticket in advance.

In Staffordshire, UK, Payzone has developed the first multi-operator bus ticket, which allows consumers to buy daily, weekly or monthly bus tickets from 200 locations offering Payzone terminals across the region. Named

the “SMART” ticket, the scheme can be used on a number of popular bus operators including First, D&G, Wardles, Scraggs, RML, Proctors, Arriva Midlands and Bakerbus, giving travellers the freedom to hop on and off buses using just one ticket and offering greater flexibility and choice of payment. Mobile phone ticketing services enable commuters to order, purchase and receive tickets via their mobile phone. Tickets are delivered to

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Ireland's M50 Motorway Toll

Payzone plc recently won the contract to provide BetEire Flow, the operator of the planned barrier-free tolling system on Ireland's M50, with retail and on-line toll payment services for users of the motorway. The M50 motorway is a National Primary Route around Ireland's capital city, Dublin. The road carries in excess of 100,000 vehicles per day.

The National Roads Authority announced the barrier-free tolling system will be introduced on the M50 in August 2008, replacing the existing barrier toll system. The contract means M50 users will be able to pay the M50 toll charges at any of Payzone Ireland's branded network of two thousand convenience stores, which already offer Payzone's mobile phone top-up and other services. Road users will also have the option of paying the M50 toll charge via the internet or by telephone using Payzone's e-payment solutions. M50 users who register with BetEire Flow will benefit from lower toll rates.* The new tolling system is among the first multi-lane barrier-free tolling systems in Europe and is regarded as a flagship project for road usage charging.

Chief Executive John Nagle said the contract would "provide an alternative and convenient way for members of the public to pay for road usage on the M50 motorway in Ireland" and "leverages the R&D investment [the company] made some time ago in developing innovative parking and other payment solutions for the road transport sector."

mobiles either as an SMS text message or a java bar-coded ticket and are secure and encrypted, ensuring against duplication of tickets.

Additionally, smart card tickets enable commuters to either load money on to a travel card or buy weekly or monthly tickets. The card can be used until the money runs out or without limit for the time frame purchased and ends the need to carry change. Web ticketing provides web-based registration, transaction and customer account management, which allows travellers using both smart card and mobile phone ticketing to view account history. For many of these new transaction processes, building familiarity on a local level helps introduce similar schemes on a larger or national level.

Convenience and accessibility are also important factors in making ITS acceptable to consumers. Prepaid networks like Payzone, are now offering consumers the option of buying prepaid tickets, paying congestion charges or declamping cars at local convenience stores across the UK and Ireland. "Whatever section of society you come from, one thing that unites all commuters is convenience.

Whether you are a regular bus user who wants to buy a monthly ticket in advance or you own a BMW which has just been clamped, being able to pay for either at your local corner shop, is incredibly appealing" explains Charmatz.

But the appeal is not solely consumer-focussed. For local authorities, ITS providers offer flexibility, point of sale productivity and a national cash handling service. This means the onus of collecting parking fines and congestion or toll charges can be passed on to companies like Payzone who simplify the process by providing large number of accessible payment points and also an invaluable cash collection service from retailers. The key is to ensure the provider has the R&D backing to offer its transport clients bespoke and flexible solutions, whether they are bus operators or local authorities.

Finally, whilst the benefits of ITS may seem clear, Charmatz is quick to point out the importance of effective communication. "A common misconception is that implementing ITS is extremely costly. In actual fact, the use of existing infrastructure makes initial set up and subsequent management costs surprisingly low." Consequently, he believes public communication needs to be at the forefront of ITS, in order to create positive opinion, build momentum and help the successful and seamless introduction of new services.

Charmatz concludes "I believe ITS has a great deal to offer the transport sector. If the industry continues to keep the consumer as the main drive for innovation, I anticipate huge improvements in congestion, pollution and convenience in the future and I am thrilled Payzone is part of it." ■



proven payment channels



- congestion payments
- road toll payments
- fine payments
- transport ticketing

As Europe's largest cash acceptance network with over 170,000 retail points across 21 countries, Payzone provides the road charging sector with a highly visible retail channel for collection of payments from consumers.

In addition to retail payments, Payzone offer a multi-channel payment solution which includes web, IVR and SMS payments.

Our range of solutions and extensive retail network means we are able to provide you with a fully integrated road charging payment solution.

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