RIGA GOES CONTACTLESS

Transport operator Rigas Satiksme, owned by the capital city of Riga, in Latvia, was set up in 2003. The company runs 460 buses, 322 trolleybuses, and 252 tram cars for a population of around 700,000 inhabitants. In January 2007, it chose Affiliated Computer Services (ACS) to implement its new ticketing system.

INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-CHARLES CAULIER, HEAD OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, ACS

How will the system be deployed in Riga?

We have signed a 13 year, Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) contract to provide the city of Riga in Latvia with a smartcard-based ticketing system.The BOT contract means ACS and the city's transport operator Rigas Satiksme will jointly maintain and operate the system for the 13 year period. ACS will install the system over a 12 month period, then run and maintain it with the operator for a further 12 years.

The BOT model enables operators who often lack sufficient know how and staff to run new ticketing systems on their own to benefit from the expertise of manufacturers, who in turn have an obligation to meet time schedules and maintain performance levels.

What are the strengths of Atlas?

Our Atlas system is the foundation for multimodal and interoperable ticketing. It functions independently of card technology, unlike, for example the Oyster card system in London, which is based on a unique technology. Thanks to its open architecture, Atlas optimises the integration of future changes: new modes of transport, new operators, new management functions and even new types of payment. ACS competes for revenue collection projects across the globe so we were early advocates of open architecture adhering to standards such as ISO 14443, which benefit transit service providers worldwide. Offering unprecedented functional performance and protection of investments, Atlas gives free rein to initiative and is thus in step with the ambitions of public transport policies.

How will Riga benefit?

The city and its surroundings have a population of around 1.2 million inhabitants. The number of sales points will be increased to 400 and offer options for both purchasing and recharging. Plus every public transport vehicle will be equipped with 2 to 4 validators and a driver console to sell tickets on board. The tickets and passes will be intermodal so users can travel seamlessly on the bus, tram and trolley bus routes.

The system provides operators with valuable data on transactions. At the end of the day, the recorded information is collected and used by operators to gain better insight into passenger behavior. They can then use this to adapt services to meet the real needs of their passengers.

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How accessible are your machines?

When we develop our ticket machines, we commission studies with specialist designers to ensure they are attractive, easy to use and accessible for all, including people with impaired mobility. It is interesting how the rules and regulations governing accessibility vary from country to country. And the solutions, too. For example, in the U.S., arrows on the ground direct the visually impaired to the machines; in France, voice information is used instead.

How is ticketing evolving?

We are seeing two major trends. Now contactless cards are pretty commonplace, mobile phone ticketing – purchasing and downloading tickets on the phone, which then serves as the ticket itself – is taking off. And another development is the use of contactless bank cards – Paypass from Mastercard or PayWave from Visa – as tickets. This solution is already being trialled in the US, in the Manhattan subway in New York. Participants in the trial are able to pay by simply tapping their Citi MasterCard® card or payment "fob" at turnstiles equipped with the contactless readers. In this trial ACS has provided a range of services including the installation of smartcard readers, transaction processing and aggregation, and customer care for participants. We are clearly moving away from the physical, paper tickets of the past to e-ticketing solutions ●

Lesley Brown