

Smartcards and interoperability: one year on

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In the very first issue of Eurotransport, I suggested that I come back after five years and review the beliefs that I postulated on smartcards and the need for interoperability. To be asked to do it after just 12 months posed an interesting question – was there anything to say? But I am a consultant so either way it shouldn't be a problem!

So, the thoughts from the first issue were:

- That transport kick-starts the process of replacing all the cards in your wallet with one card
- That there is a need for interoperability of devices, cards and data
- That ITSO is the best thing since sliced bread

ITSO progress

The implementation of ITSO has not gone as fast as everyone would have liked for a number of reasons – but to pick the main ones:

- It has taken suppliers longer to develop a fully compliant kit. Perhaps not surprising when you consider the breadth of the ITSO specification.
- The key management system from ITSO (the SMS) was late in arriving due to the complexity of both the contract negotiations and the software. And even now the market cannot use it until the market provides the interface suite known as the AMS (Asset Management System).
- Developers have been delayed a little in implementing the full range of cards, but with the availability of the Innovision card from last November, then the full set is on the market.

ITSO has taken a pragmatic approach to these issues and has introduced a number of steps in conjunction with schemes and suppliers to enable progress to be made despite the above. For example:

- An early adopters scheme which provides Security Access Modules with embedded keys prior to the SMS service availability.
- Interim or phased certification for suppliers kit which matches the partial functionality against the early scheme requirements.
- The I2F/suppliers group which allows suppliers to jointly develop and demonstrate particular aspects of the ITSO specification. This was best seen at the Moving On Conference in Liverpool, UK, last November.

So where does that leave ITSO scheme implementations and my theory of interoperability? I can do no better than to reproduce a recent article from the ITSO newsletter (well I did write it) – which shows just how the schemes in one area of the country are progressing and how they overlap (see 'The North West Goes Smart' panel).

If I were to extend my definition of the North West then I could bring in Merseytravel and Yorcarn, and then Nottinghamshire CC overlap with the latter and of course the logical conclusion to that is London, where there now exists a roadmap for the Oyster card/scheme to be ITSO compliant.

I would therefore still defend my beliefs that ITSO is the best method of providing interoperability and it is happening. Will it allow all my cards to be replaced by one? Perhaps not one but just a couple.