

The Swiss mean business

With five Executive Sessions, 42 Special Interest Sessions, 151 Scientific and Technical Papers and three Interactive Poster Squares, there are plenty of pressing reasons why you should go to Geneva.

The preliminary programme for the 7th European Congress and Exhibition on Intelligent Transport Systems and Services has been published. The event, as everyone is now well aware, is taking place in Geneva, June 3-6, and the theme is 'ITS for Sustainable Mobility'. And the Swiss do mean business. Just look what Moritz Leuenberger, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of the Environment, Transport Energy and Communications (DETEC), says in his welcome comments.

'What is the point of building expensive roads if at times they are empty and at others – when traffic congestion is at its worst – they look more like picnic areas and parking lots? When we build rail infrastructure we draw up the train schedule very early on, when the rails are laid. It would not cross our minds to let the trains run at the engineer's whim.

'So, let us make better and fuller use of the road infrastructure. Individual drivers are not in a position to use the roads intelligently – they do not have the overall picture. The intelligence can be obtained using telematics. Telematics make roads smart.'

Opening ceremonies at ITS Congresses have taken on quite a competitive edge and Geneva has gone for broke. The venue for the ceremony, at 16.00hrs, June 3, is the Assembly Hall at the United Nations. Moritz Leuenberger will be there along with Jacques Barrot, EC Vice President and Commissioner for Transport, to make the welcome speeches. It is going to be a very swish affair in surroundings that most people are unlikely to see in normal circumstances. The opening ceremony will be followed by a Welcome Reception – all Congress delegates are invited.

The event then kicks off in earnest next morning at PALEXPO with a high level Plenary Session. Speakers include Eva Molnar, Director Transport Division of UNECE, Abdullah Al Mogbel, Deputy Minister of Transport from Saudi Arabia and Shelly Row from the Federal Highways Administration of the USA. The speakers will talk about ITS policies, visions and applications from their part of the world.

There are five Executive Sessions – the themes are sustainability of mobility, co-modality, case studies in Switzerland and Alpine regions, traffic and transport management, and paying for mobility. In addition, there are 42 Special Interest Sessions, 151 Scientific and Technical Papers and three Interactive Poster Squares.

One of the most valuable parts of any Congress programme is the choice of technical visits which gives professionals an opportunity to visit first-hand some of the most technologically advanced facilities in their field. Geneva has put on an excellent programme. Visit 1 is to the Mont-Blanc Tunnel which opened in 1965. However, after the fire in 1999, the tunnel was closed for three years. This tragic accident prompted the EU to mandate new safety standards which have been implemented in the refurbished tunnel. The visit will provide an insight into tunnel operations, fee collection and the latest safety procedures.

Visit 2 is to Metro m2, Lausanne's new fully automated metro system. The system is on schedule to open in September of this year with trains running every 90 seconds at speeds of up to 60 km/h. The visit will take in the control centres, maintenance facilities and one of the stations.

Visit 3 is a must for anyone who has, or might have in future, involvement in a road user charging project. The visit is to the Bardonnex customs station to see the Swiss Heavy Vehicle Fee system in practice. Of particular interest are the arrangements for managing foreign-registered vehicles. They include registration for the first time, the km declaration when entering the country, the km declaration and payment procedure when leaving, and compliance check of the declared distance.

The final visit is an unusual one but a unique opportunity to visit a world-



The Gala Dinner takes place aboard M/S Lausanne and offers a grand tour of the bay of Geneva.

renowned research centre. CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, has its main research facilities near Geneva and is home to the giant particle accelerator. Visitors will be given an introduction to CERN and its work and have the opportunity to visit one of the research areas.

Last, but by no means least, is the Gala Dinner on Thursday 5th June. This will take place aboard the M/S Lausanne and offers a grand tour of the greater bay of Geneva. The evening will start with cocktails followed by a dinner featuring mouth-watering specialities from the region. Network and enjoy the spectacular view as the sun sets on Lake Geneva.

The final comment comes from Eva Molnar. 'Unless there are standards and/or appropriate ITS architectures, we are soon going to enter the age of the "electronic curtain". The threat posed by a lack of inter-operability and compatibility in ITS may be several times greater than the problems we can see in the railways.' Plenty of good reasons why ITS professionals should take this opportunity to get together and find solutions.

The full programme, along with registration options, is available on line at www.itsineurope.com