

ABS not ASBO

London adopts softly softly approach to ISA launch

For the benefit of non-UK based readers, the ASBO is an Anti-Social Behaviour Order. ASBOs are used in the UK to control mainly young offenders who are disrupting their local community by their anti-social behaviour. Hamish Keith, of Transport for London (TfL), presented at Geneva in June, under the heading 'ISA – are we already at the stage of deployment?', and said that, if given the green light, London's ISA trial would be based on the concept of driver assistance rather than penalties, thus ABS (Antilock Braking System) and not ASBO.

Asked whether ISA could be made compulsory for drivers who, for instance, had been convicted of speeding, he said that TfL did not want to stigmatise ISA as a punishment. The context of this comment was the recognition that one of the key barriers to deployment of ISA in London is acceptance by the driving public.

ISA for London

London's work on ISA goes back some way now. The Institute of Transport Studies in Leeds, under Oliver Carsten, was commissioned to produce a scoping study for TfL in 2005. The aim was to determine possible mechanisms for, and the likely efficacy of, the introduction of ISA in London. This report was delivered in January 2006 and since then TfL has been preparing the all-important digital map that is the basis for ISA.

TfL has decided to go for a 'voluntary/advisory' ISA system, voluntary, said Hamish in that it would be voluntary whether or not the driver had ISA fitted or engaged once fitted, and advisory in that it would bring the speed limit into the car and to the attention of the driver but

would not intervene to govern the speed.

In his presentation Hamish outlined the barriers to deployment which have been identified in London. In addition to acceptance by the public, he listed the creation of the digital speed map, the standardisation of this data and finally cost. TfL, he said, do not intend to be involved in the deployment of ISA. Rather, they see their role as providing the map information and infrastructure and providing encouragement and incentives to help ISA take up. That means that the commercial risk will rest with private companies. TfL's job, said Hamish, would be to demonstrate to these companies that ISA is a viable, marketable technology.

Inevitably, this comes back to public acceptance and people's concerns about privacy and whether or not their actions are being monitored by external parties. A key message to get

across to the public, said Hamish, was that collectively ISA doesn't care where people drive, or when. 'The only thing that ISA cares about is how people drive. ISA is an assistance tool which will promote safety, help drivers stay within the speed limit and reduce their fuel consumption.' He said that given the reality that in fact the authorities were getting better and better at catching drivers who speed, one of the key benefits of ISA in future could be that it would help drivers not to get caught. 'There are people who will want ISA and will be prepared to pay for it. Of course it is true that the people who don't need it are the ones most likely to be the early adopters but we believe that they could be very important in promoting the ISA concept to a wider public.'

'The challenge that we face is getting people to associate this technology with safety. We



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“London is keen to demonstrate that ISA is a viable, marketable technology”

need to show clear benefits – this is what you get when you have this system in your car.’

Getting the technology into the car is one challenge, but there is another equally important aspect to public acceptance and that is the accuracy of the data. If it is wrong, or perceived to be wrong, and the public don’t trust it, then ISA would be dead in the water. So a fundamental requirement of a London launch has been the creation of an accurate digital speed map and then a strategy to ensure that this map is kept up to date.

The basis for the London map was work done by Colin Buchanan under contract to TfL to map speed signs within the M25. This was then subjected to detailed checking from on-road agents, necessary because signs sometimes did not exist when they should, and sometimes were in the wrong place. The process involved working closely with London’s local authorities. ‘Even when the authority is less than positive about ISA itself, they are ecstatic about the digital map because it creates an instant asset registry. Our experience shows that there are some legacy speed zones around and many authorities simply don’t have the resources to monitor the situation, so there is real benefit to having an accurate speed map to work from.’

The intention is to make this map freely available to all and to this end the map could be posted on the TfL website as a ‘free to use’

resource. However, it is not yet in a format that makes it generally accessible. Hamish says that TfL are talking to map providers about taking the map and translating it into a format that can be easily accessed. One option being explored is to use Geography Markup Language (GML).

The current best option is to input the map into a standard TomTom navigation system.

This has the advantage, says Hamish, that people already trust TomTom so that this route could provide an important first step in getting the map out into the public arena. ‘This is an important platform for us and we are building on it. But we will be talking to all the other map providers to get the information onto their base level map.’

Keeping the map up to date is another issue, however. According to Hamish about 0.5% of the map will on average change between April to December, while between December and March roughly 3% of the map will change. The legal orders for these changes normally appear in the London Gazette 1.5 months ahead of the event. In the interim TfL would be able to work out where they expect the sign to be and once the change has become effective, surveyors will go out to validate the location of the signs. It is essential, said Hamish, that the map and signs correspond. ‘People are much more likely to trust their eyes than a system on the dashboard.’ The update mechanisms currently under review include a TfL SIM card which would work with whichever ISA supplier has been selected. Alternatively the data could be pushed directly into the vehicle using GSM, using an RS feed to notify people when data changes.

ISA is not yet deployed in London but this could change over the next few months. An advisory ISA application is being developed by Dutch Company, Technolution, and may soon be tested on London’s streets. Once the technology is proven, TfL will look at installing ISA into its vehicle fleet. Once deployed the next step would be to start promoting the ISA concept to the general public. TfL are already talking to the insurance industry about possible financial incentives for drivers who use ISA. Longer term, it may be possible to consider differential pricing for the congestion charge.

Virtual Travel Agent to take centre stage at i-Travel workshop

A new virtual travel agent (VTA) concept is due to take the stage at the European i-Travel project’s first workshop in Brussels, Belgium, on 13 November 2008. Says ERTICO-ITS Europe Project Coordinator Gary Bridgeman: ‘The VTA will run a web-based secured application for travellers to specify preferred departure dates and times, destination(s), stops and, possibly, travel preferences.

‘It will operate via web-enabled fixed and mobile terminals, eg smartphones or PDAs as well as home- or office-based PCs. It will also pick up real-time information on any major trip-related event. If this threatens to impact seriously on a planned trip (or if the traveller wants to make changes to it, the VTA will be able automatically to recalculate new options, submit these for choice and approval, make any new bookings and payments and update the overall trip schedule. Personal mobility will take a decisive step forward when travellers can plan, book and pay for anything from a simple trip to a complex, multimodal international journey.’

Two key innovations are:

- The integration of e-commerce and internet technologies to create the first B2B ‘eMarketplace’ in the traffic and travel information services sector, which
- Will connect a wide-ranging community of travel content and service suppliers to new traveller markets needing instant delivery of trip information and support

The 18-month, €1.4 million is being co-funded by the Transport Directorate of the EC DG for Research and coordinated by ERTICO-ITS Europe. It started in January 2008.

www.i-travelproject.com