

ITSO replies

Roger Ford made some interesting comments about ticketing on the upcoming South Western franchise in the May 2006 issue of *Modern Railways* (p22). One or two facts went astray and here at ITSO we would like to set the record straight, by focusing on a few extracts from the article.

'ITSO... stands for Integrated Transport Smartcard Organisation' wrote Mr Ford. Not so. ITSO now stands for ITSO. Some two years ago the organisation abandoned the definition as the scope was wider than transport, and smartcard has been replaced with Customer Media (Eurospeak) as the media may be in rings, phones, embedded and still work just like a smartcard.

'ITSO is the creation of civil servants.' ITSO as an organisation was created by a number of Passenger Transport Executives, local authorities and industry suppliers. It is a members' organisation which has obtained support from the Department for Transport through a number of development contracts. The ITSO specification was written on behalf of those members and agreed with them – many contributed to the actual work.

'ITSO aims to provide a common smartcard for use by all transport operators...' ITSO is a specification for an application that can be loaded onto a range of smartcards (which others supply). The specification describes eight different types of media or contactless smart card that can be used, from low cost single use cards, through the familiar Mifare 1K and 4K to top of the range microprocessor cards. It also includes a platform definition for use of Oyster cards. This gives schemes a wide choice of media to suit their particular application and business model – not necessarily a transport card. Scotland is the prime example of this – a citizen card with transport as one of the entitlements.

'Currently there are three ITSO schemes...' Slightly more, it would appear – Scotland, Cheshire, Merseytravel, Wales (two), Nowcard, Yorcard, Greater Manchester PTE, Southampton City, Nottinghamshire County Council, Brentford. And then there is the collaboration with CNA of France to enable Calypso card schemes to interoperate, Finland and Hungary are adopting ITSO as their national standard, there is a collaboration with VdV (Germany) on European standards, there are two ITSO-based invitations to tender in South Africa, and so on. All this activity speaks for itself.

'English schemes are waiting for keys from the Royal Bank of Scotland whilst Scotland being on the spot has got theirs'. ITSO is on course to deliver 'within the next few months'. All the schemes which have needed their keys and ISAMs (ITSO secure application module) have had them (and the RBS security management service operation is actually located in the south of England!).

'According to informed sources, the SW franchise announcement came as a surprise to ITSO'. Actually not a complete surprise to ITSO, but maybe to some 'informants'! However it would not matter if ITSO did not know as ITSO does not get involved in the planning, operation or commercials of schemes so there is no reason for it to know in advance. ITSO provides an environment which schemes can pick up when they are ready to.

'Whoever wins SW might be able to get a closed ITSO system running'. There is no such thing as a closed ITSO system. ITSO is about interoperability, for example, those smartcards on the South Western system could be used in Cheshire to load local products (tickets) on. Any restrictions come from the product being acceptable or not – as it is today with paper tickets.

'ITSO supplies only the components and security keys'. ITSO supplies the environment for the security – not the scheme components. These are usually obtained, both hardware and software, from the growing range of suppliers who are now active members of ITSO.

'ITSO is about buses and concessionary passes.' It is true that up to now (mostly but not exclusively) the first application implemented in a scheme is usually bus based concessionary travel – simply because this is a major win area, particularly after the Budget announcement on free national travel on local buses. But the ITSO specification and environment can be used for any 'ticket' including not-defined 'private' applications. The already defined ITSO product entities include one that can have multiple reservation segments, hardly a 'bus concessionary' product.

'A conductor can scan a paper ticket in less than a second but he has to put a smartcard into a reader and interrogate it...' The ITSO specification requires the cards to be contactless – an inspector therefore may merely touch the media against the unit (which can then produce a 'valid' or 'not valid' response in well under a second) and the software can display all the acceptable tickets for that location without any 'interrogation'. The media or smart cards defined by ITSO, being contactless, do not need to be 'put into a reader'.

'There is no journey log on the card... what might this mean for revenue allocation?' This statement is plain wrong. There are multiple methods of logging journeys on the media in the ITSO specification which can be made available to the conductor and also transactions are created on each leg of a (multiple leg) journey, so revenue allocation in the back office may in ITSO be based on 100% actual information rather than agreed formulae.

Finally, to underline the importance of ITSO, here is an extract from 'News Front' in the June issue of *Modern Railways*:

'Transport for London has agreed to pay for Oyster smartcard readers, station equipment and back office systems for all London rail stations in Zones 1-6. This will offer train companies the opportunity to accept Oyster 'pay as you go' stored-value payments on their services, though the train operator must install, operate and maintain the equipment.

'The Department for Transport has also agreed to fund upgrades to existing Oyster equipment in London to accept basic smartcards of the ITSO standard being adopted elsewhere in the UK. The expected cost is around £19million.' Those interested in finding out more should visit the ITSO web site on www.ITSO.co.uk

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Berlin Zoo

In John Gough's comprehensive description of Berlin's railway renaissance (June issue), one of the tables indicates that as from 28 May 2006 no long-distance trains stop at Berlin Zoo station. This is not quite correct as several overnight trains continue to pick up / set down passengers at Zoo station near the start / end of their journeys.

It is rather surprising that DB (German Rail) apparently chose to ignore the views of most Berliners that stops at Zoo station should be retained by long-distance trains. This action and the chosen location of Hauptbahnhof must be making some Berliners feel that the railways are here to serve the political and administrative elite rather than the ordinary citizens of (west) Berlin (who traditionally have snubbed centralised control over their lives).

It will be interesting to see if the economic prosperity of the Zoo area suffers a mortal blow. The station on the morning of 29 May (a normal working day in Germany) seemed eerily quiet as ICE trains swept through without stopping. The notorious hustle and bustle of the station had all but disappeared. However, the DB Reisebüro was fully staffed on all counters, but very quiet, with sales staff waiting rather forlornly to sell tickets to almost anywhere in Europe as they had always done there. No doubt the numerous retail outlets that trade throughout the station will be looking for substantial rent reductions from DB, if they haven't done so already.

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