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The EBSF IT architecture is integrated into two test benches, conveniently located at the ECE Paris engineering school[2].

Coordinated by the ITxPT consortium, access is practically open for everyone, subject to a fee dependent of the user's membership status. The benches, which represent the on-board and back office architecture of the bus system, offer services to specify, test, qualify and showcase IT solutions

PUSHING FORWARD

INIT, the supplier of integrated Planning, Dispatching, ITS and Fare Collection solutions is one of the nine founding members (see box) of ITxPT. It was also active in the EBSF project, and is involved in 3iBS. Mobility spoke with **Dirk Weißer, project manager research**, to find out more about the company's role(s) in helping make full interoperability of IT systems in PT applications a reality.

WHEN DID ITXPT OFFICIALLY KICK OFF? AND HOW LONG WILL IT RUN?

The official start meeting took place on June 13, 2013. Over the next 12 months, subsequent activities included preparing the consortium agreement (including establishing its status as a non-profit organisation), clarifying the overall financial aspects, and drawing up a marketing strategy. Also, as part of the latter, we have showcased the EBSF test bench(es) (see box) together with ITxPT, at trade shows such as IT-TRANS (Karlsruhe), Transports Publics (Paris), and the 10th ITS European Congress in Helsinki. With regards the duration of ITxPT, there is no end date in view; it will last as long as the consortium works together well.

HOW WAS INIT OCCUPIED IN THE EBSF AND 3IBS INITIATIVES?

We participated in two EBSF work groups – one focusing on the communication architecture on board vehicles, and another dedicated to the communication between several back offices and the vehicle. We are part of the IT Focus Group of 3iBS, too.

WHY WAS THIS ITXPT FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY DEEMED NECESSARY?

The idea behind ITxPT is to create a consortium, funded by its industry members, to push forward the IT architecture developed by the EBSF. As a complete ITS system provider, INIT offers its customers a panoply of IT solutions for public transport. However, unless implementing a brand new system from scratch, we are not starting out in virgin territory, but have to integrate our systems with existing infrastructure interfaces. And this multifaceted task – integrating systems with the on-board units of different competitors, and different generations too, all on the same vehicle fleet – requires a considerable effort, as well as costing time and money.

THE PLATFORM IS BASED ON 'OPEN ARCHITECTURE'. WHY IS THIS FEATURE SO CRUCIAL?

A closed system basically means one equipment supplier and one system. However open architectures allow for multiple device vendors, and so should create healthier competition for public transit vehicle builders and operators i.e. by offering them choice. Furthermore, since open systems embrace plug-and-play, the latter can be kept up to date, in line with changing needs and technology.

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At INIT we have brilliant developers, but rather than evolving five different interfaces it's far more intelligent for them to focus on just one, and make it work really well. This in turn frees them up to concentrate more on innovation – for the benefit of ourselves at t, our customers, transport operators, and even the end-users, the passengers themselves.

THE KEY FUNCTION OF ITXPT IS TO ACT AS A TECHNICAL PLATFORM FOR TESTING & VALIDATING THE PLUG-AND-PLAY IT SYSTEMS DEVELOPED? WHY IS PLUG-AND-PLAY SO ESSENTIAL?

It's all about making time and cost savings by removing the need to configure new systems when adding them to a vehicle, i.e. along the same principle as slotting a memory stick into a computer to instantly access its content. Plug-and-play systems integrate public transport, and share information sent by all stakeholders involved in the bus journey.

At INIT, when we have a new customer, a new project, our first step is to check all the existing hardware, to examine the plugs and cabling on board to find out if we can use them as they are, what we will have to adjust, etc. And the hardware is never plug-and-play. In other words we have to develop, install, test, adjust, and so forth. This process takes a lot of time, effort, and, of course, costs money.

WHAT TRENDS ARE YOU SEEING IN ITS IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORLD AT LARGE?

In everyday life, outside of public transport, IT systems are becoming increasingly the norm. For

Layout changed

example, a decade ago, touch interfaces were very rare, or unusual, as were smartphones. Then came the iPhone, since when the touch interface has become a must-have. However in public transport, touch screens and smartphones, for example, are developing more for passenger-orientated applications, e.g. information, ticketing, etc. They serve to create points of contact with passengers, to align the sector with their everyday habits as citizens of today's digital world.

Having said that, at the professional end of public transport, i.e. back offices, management and operations, the traditional way of doing things with a 'normal' desktop computer and keyboard still exist, simply because the interface is more practical, e.g. for filing a report on a traffic incident, and so forth.

However for our customers, modularity of on-board equipment is very important. What they want is easy integration of equipment from supplier A, supplier B, and supplier C.

HOW IS BUSINESS FOR INIT? HAS THE RECESSION MADE AN IMPACT?

Overall, I would say the economic downturn hasn't had a marked effect on the company because we are active across the globe, e.g. from Nottingham (U.K.) and Avignon (France) to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There are always ups and downs in markets at any given time.

A new development for us in recent years has been the ticketing segment for public transport in North America. This is quite surprising because the systems used to be rudimentary. But for some reason they are now adopting

e- and mobile ticketing. So this market is really growing for us, as is Asia, where we are interested in developing business ●

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