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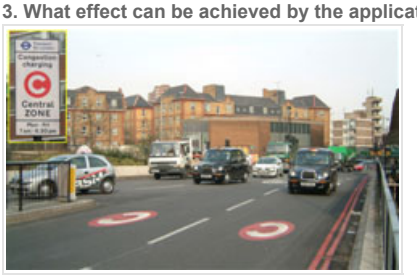
IRF Policy Committee Chair Josef Czako interviewed in Russia

This article contains a copy of an interview held by the Russian magazine LogLink on 16 May 2011 with Josef Czako, chairman of the IRF Policy Committee on ITS. A Russian version of the full article can be downloaded **here**.

1. What are the problems in the area of roads that impede the development of Russia? Which way do you think the state could raise money to build roads?
Over the past 30 years many roads have been built - as in Russia and around the world. As we know, the actual construction of roads accounts for only approx. 10% of the costs, while 90% goes to their operation. Thus, the state invested those 10%, to create the road network. Now we are discovering that the resources are lacking to also maintain the roads properly. To begin to collect fees for the road use and, of course to invest these fees into the construction and operation of roads will positively affect the financing and operation possibilities for road infrastructure. This is one aspect of the problem. On the other side there is still a need for new roads, for which the state money is also not enough. This may lead to various new models for financing – based on private-public partnership principles. This is an extremely effective alternative way of financing road infrastructure. The road users will pay for the use of these roads by road charges or road tolls. And usually these new (toll) roads combine the best practices of both, the public and private side, with the result of high class roads.

2. What is the relevance of intelligent transport systems (ITS) today in the world? What will be relevant for Russia?
ITS can be usefully applied in many different areas. Firstly, if we are talking about levying of certain fees, or road pricing, intelligent transport systems can help the State to receive certain income - money that can then be invested in building and operating roads. Secondly, these systems can help reduce the occurrence of congestion by optimizing traffic control. Thirdly, their use may reduce the number of road accidents. And in addition, ITS can assist in reducing the harmful impact of traffic to the environment. All of these effects may well be achieved in the Russian context.

3. What effect can be achieved by the application of ITS in Russia?



As in other EU countries, also in Russia ITS just follows the transportation strategies defined by the government. In the Transportation system development Strategy until 2030 there are clear goals defined, like the accessibility and high quality of the transportation services for drivers, integration into the international transportation space and realization of Russia's transit potential, transport system safety improvement or mitigation of negative environmental impact from the transport complex. These goals you can achieve with ITS solutions. In some major Russian cities the problem of traffic jams is very urgent. The authorities believe that new roads and interchanges will not solve the problem and are discussing possible restrictive measures - restrictions on entry to the city centre, the rules of even and odd numbers, and so on. But when we talk about traffic jams in all cities, whether large or small – we need to distinguish two aspects of the problem. The first is that the infrastructure is inadequate to accommodate the volume of traffic, the second that the number of cars is too high. Regarding the second aspect, ITS can help reduce the amount of traffic, entering into town, through the use of "smart" road charging model. This is referred to as "Congestion Charging Scheme" as in place in Stockholm or London. Actually the name is wrong: the scheme does not charge for congestion, but reduces congestion. Congestion is lowered significantly based on a strategic road charging scheme, in which, for example, the entry into the city during the morning rush hours is costlier than in the daytime, but on weekends it could be even free. This helps reduce traffic and encourage people to ensure that they use public transport instead of cars.

Now for the first aspect of the problem of traffic jams. Looking at the big cities, we understand that there is an extremely important form of innovative traffic management. A concrete example: recently it took two hours for me to get from Vnukovo airport to the centre of Moscow. We drove along the main road, but we had to stand for 2-5 minutes many times at intersections where not a lot of traffic was crossing, but where, nonetheless, the traffic light kept being red for us. And therefore a system would be required of dynamic traffic management that "knows" what the state of motion is currently and on the basis of this data controls the operation of traffic lights. Another observation I made during this trip is that the city probably needs much more tunnels and flyovers at the intersections of roads, so the cross traffic could move to either under or over the road rather than having to wait at a traffic light and cause congestion. The investments into tunnels and flyovers, innovative traffic management, etc., could be financed by the Road Users, with a “Congestion Charging Scheme”, which would generate revenues for investment for the improvement of transport infrastructure of the city.

4. How long will it take to implement a system of tolls in Russia?
Russia has already begun to introduce appropriate technology. We can say that in the field of ITS there are the leading country and "catching up" countries. I think Russia would have been correctly attributed already strongly on the way to the first category. In this case, the number one country in the world for the development of ITS, e.g. in the field of road safety, is deservedly considered to be Sweden or Finland. It is followed by the United States. However, I note that Russia is currently very active in various fields is developing technologies that can be used in intelligent transportation systems. One of these areas - the GLONASS system, has great potential. Given its availability, we can say that Russia is ahead of many European countries, as the European counterpart, the Galileo system, is not yet operational. In general, it is difficult to give a global response to your question. Cross-country comparisons are difficult to make; each of them ends up in their own way unfair. So I am in favour of looking ahead and formulating policies that would solve specific local problems.

5. What effect will be achieved by the introduction of toll road from Moscow to St. Petersburg?
Certainly the increase of the toll incomes, as demonstrated by the first toll site on M-4 Don highway (from 414th to 464th km in the Lipetsk region) which was put into operation on last December. Despite the fact that on this road toll is collected only manually, the result surpassed the Avtodor´s (Russia state road building company) expectations since the very first days. Without considering holidays, the indicator of intensity of movement never fell below 5.000 cars a day, and on specific days exceeded a 10.000 boundary. In December only, not less than one million roubles a day were collected. Avtodor plans to collect around 320-350 million roubles on an annual basis. However, the capacity of the manual tolling is limited. The next step which has to be taken is the all-electronic toll collection with no or only few toll booths, and in future perhaps only electronic toll collection gantries at entrances and exits, or at strategic locations on the mainline of the road. Russia is not an exception - tolling for road use is becoming more common throughout Europe and gradually an understanding is emerging among the driving public that tolling is the only realistic way of improving and maintaining a safe, managed road network. (…)