



## ITS needs to talk the talk as well as walk the walk

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### **Josef Czako talks to ITS International about how the way we talk about mobility solutions needs to change.**

To those who deal with a topic on a weekly basis, change can be imperceptible. The incremental improvements made hour by hour and day by day can often hide the progress made. It is only through standing back and taking advantage of a little distance and time that the advances of a few years or decades can be appreciated.

There are numerous interpretations of what constitutes 'ITS' and how long it has existed. Some would have it that the industry is now well into its third decade but, whichever view one subscribes to, it is clear that ITS – nebulous concept that it may sometimes be – has matured. We have passed through a period of research, development and initial deployments to reach a stage where there is a range of solutions and services which can fully support policy aims.

However, ITS is a multi-faceted concept, involving much more than just technology. It also involves policy – technological, social and economic – and, as the technologies continue to make iterative gains, so the ITS industry's potential for influence grows. The delivery of highly personalised travel information to the individual on the move is becoming a part of the mainstream, for example. This trend of pervasiveness will continue and it should be driving some profound changes, not least in terms of how we talk about ITS. Yet the fact is that the industry continues to talk in its own technology-based mixture of jargon and buzzwords when it needs to be shifting with its own developments and describing what it is and does in more prosaic terms.

### **Speaking clearly – how?**



Josef Czako

It is an issue which concerns Josef Czako, Chairman of the **IRF's** Policy Committee on ITS and Vice President of International Business Development at **Kapsch TrafficCom**. When it comes to such matters he described himself as neither a technophile nor a technophobe, nor even a classic pragmatist. Rather, he says, he is 'a future-oriented optimistic realist; an expert with a background in the socio-economic, technology, standardisation and financing fields who would like to use those skills to help the transport sector develop better with more sustainable mobility'.

Despite ITS's coming of age, and some highly successful deployments, a recent 600km journey he made by car from southern to northern Germany and back reinforced how much we still need to do to change perceptions of ITS, he says.

"Moving from A to B is just not fun anymore: the drive north took six hours whilst the same distance back south took over 10 hours, with fully congested routes all the way, stop-go traffic and no information being provided on alternative routes. The same journey by train, with four people and luggage, would have involved three changes and so was no real alternative.

"And why, with all the technology that we can bring to bear, should I still fear an accident whilst driving? Why should I not be able to expect predictable journey times? We often talk about making road travel more efficient, safer and more environmentally friendly but I'd add also more comfortable and convenient to the list."

An issue is that comfort and convenience require rather more technology than is currently deployed but the language we need to use to bring about more deployments should be distinctly non-technical, he feels. That ITS's lexicon has barely shifted from bits, bytes, computer memory or communication speed is one issue. Another is that in line with learning a new vocabulary we need to take more time over policy and articulation of the real end-to-end requirements which ITS has to – and can – service.

## Opening the door

"Discussions are still driven far too much by technology and don't adequately address the longer-term needs," Czako continues. "An irony is that a greater focus on needs and requirements would actually open the door more to the technologists as they'd then have a better idea of what might be needed and could then bring their expertise to bear more fully. I think we've got rather better at this over the years but we're not yet where we could be.

"A big improvement would be to involve all stakeholders at a very much earlier stage, recognising that the societal effects of ITS solutions such as electronic tolling and charging schemes or eCall can be very wide indeed. That involves more than just the political decision-makers. If we take previous discussions about safety – about seat-belts, drink-driving, motorcycle helmets and so on – it's clear that we need everyone to really understand what ITS can do. Navigation systems and smartphones provide us with examples: people have no clue about the multiple technologies or services behind them. But people understand their convenience and utility – their real benefits – and that understanding breeds acceptance.

"We need to use more and more Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and cost

benefits to explain the benefits of ITS. And we need to work on intermodality and interoperability in ITS; strategies need to combine, not conflict, and they shouldn't be limited by geographical borders."

## Broader focus

There are, he notes, so many success stories but we remain rather poor at telling them.

"Electronic toll collection, for instance, has been a major success. There are now thousands of tolled roads around the world and there's a growing understanding of how the self-financing of infrastructure results in better services, whereas with eCall people tend to look at things from only a very small perspective. Yes, it can save lives but there are also wider benefits, such as significant reductions in costs within the medical system.

"I'm reminded of a story about Henry Ford. He added a new spring to the driver's seat of the Model T car and, as he said, 'I've spent \$1 million adding a new spring to increase driver comfort but I've had to spend another \$1 million to tell the world about it.' ITS is in the same boat."

A limitation is the current choices of media as the basis for discussion and publicity. Although the ITS sector is well-served by quite a number of specialist publications, their readerships can be counted in the tens of thousands – and that has to be seen in the context of a planet with 6 billion inhabitants.

Czako: "Who makes the procurement decisions? Elected officials, who themselves read the mass media. If we don't build ITS's reputation there, it's always going to be regarded as specialist or niche. It's not a question of blaming anyone for the situation we're in; it's more a matter of adjustment and of forming arguments to suit. Congestion and road accidents, for example, are estimated to cost national economies hundreds of billions of Euros. The figures quoted are of the same magnitude as those for the various banking crises of recent years, and yet the banking crises are somehow seen as more important than building a sustainable transport infrastructure and saving a huge amount of money that could be used to finance better education or the fight against poverty, for example.

"That brings us back to the need for long-term solutions and helping decision-makers at the political level to improve their own awareness. It was the reason behind, for instance, the IRF Manifesto on ITS which we published at the 2012 **ITS World Congress** in Vienna. Well, we now have to get on and deploy that manifesto, with the help of the media.

"Motivating politicians means offering them successes. We have to explain that sustainable mobility is a success story, that congestion is reduced, that safety is improved. At the end of the day, we also need to gift politicians the opportunity to say,

'I fought that fight, and the fight was worth it.'"

That means finding and engaging many champions and also looking to mould the news agenda. That in itself is a major task: a long-held axiom is that bad news sells newspapers, and finding a way to encourage news editors to publish positive stories will require significant effort.

“It’s certainly an uphill struggle in the face of mass media cynicism but how long did it take to win the debates over seat belts or drink-driving?” Czako continues. “It’s a movement; we can’t expect overnight change, but if we don’t start the journey, we will not get to the destination at all.

“An area which would complement and help to raise awareness is education in ITS. Education should start in kindergarten but at the other end of the scale we have almost no ITS curriculum in our universities. If you look across the budgets in the various Directorates General in the **European Union** it’s very hard to find figures for education on road safety. You can find them for all sorts of other things but really not for ITS.”

## Doomsday... or Paradise?

We can carry on as we are, or we can act to change things. Czako is fond of describing nothing, or too little, as the Doomsday Scenario.

“Do we not work instead towards the ‘Paradise Scenario’ – 10 or 15 years from now when the KPIs prove that mobility has improved?” he asks. “I think we have to. There’s a growing need for mobility as people around the globe grow in number, become wealthier and consume more. At the same time, we have to find ways to constrain that growth. ITS therefore has two conflicting but major objectives – to constrain and yet facilitate. To do that well it needs to become fixed now in the minds of all those who use it.”



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