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Australia a leader in linked tolling technology

Australia is home to one of the best performing toll roads networks in the world according to data presented at the recent National Electronic Tolling Committee (NeTC) Industry Forum hosted recently in Melbourne by Intelligent Transport Systems - Australia.

Event facilitator, Peter Bentley said Australia embraced the concept of national interoperability for tolled roads more than 12 years ago to link separate toll road infrastructure projects across many states into a seamless and efficient customer service network.

"Few countries have capitalised on the benefits flowing from interoperability of electronic tags and customer accounts. This approach delivers significant benefits to toll road operators and their customers, particularly transport businesses," said Peter Bentley, who is a director of Louben Consulting.

"In Europe and geographically large nations including the USA, toll road customers must have a collection of accounts - and electronic tags stuck to their windscreen - to travel from region to region, or from state to state. To restructure these separate systems into customer friendly 'one shop' accounts and seamless travel will be costly," he said.

General Manager of Interlink Roads Rex Wright told the NeTC Forum there are now 15 toll roads linked through 9 tolling operators in Australia. "These businesses have a memorandum of understanding on technology issues to drive world's best practice standards forward in Australia," he said

"Between them these operators have more than 6 million toll tags in circulation, with about 20% of these more than 10 years old. This means a truck making a Melbourne to Brisbane delivery can use toll roads in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland with a single electronic tag and receive a single monthly invoice." said Rex Wright.

"For a nation heavily reliant on road freight to transport food and goods required for daily life, Australia's interoperable network serves us well. If Australia had not adopted interoperability early, it would be too costly to bring the separate systems together now to deliver the efficiencies we have enjoyed for over a decade," he said.

Challenges to government and regulators

To maintain the efficiency of Australia's toll roads, emerging technologies are generating unprecedented opportunities, but are also bringing new challenges. Chief executive officer of Transport Certification Australia Chris Koniditsiotis told the NeTC Forum the rapid pace of technology creates special challenges for government and regulators.

"The Intelligent Access Program for road freight vehicles operated by Transport Certification Australia highlights the benefits of a unified approach by government, regulators, infrastructure providers and users. Using a Global Navigation Satellite System to monitor heavy vehicles' road use, this program helps to increase the productivity of transport operators and road assets, while improving road safety and environmental outcomes," said Chris Koniditsiotis.
"The role of government and regulation in the 21st century will be to establish appropriate ground rules for infrastructure systems and performance, and thereby create certainty for tolling industry stakeholders and enhance the benefits to society.

"This requires government and regulators to understand the industry's role in developing infrastructure and to engage with the industry in planning a balanced approach to manage community expectations and avoid regulatory failure," he said.

**Transport Pricing**

A number of speakers alerted Forum delegates to the implications posed by infrastructure user management systems. Increasing numbers of Australian government authorities are considering electronic management of roads and charging for the use of roads and parking spaces.

Australia's successful electronic tolling industry, with its 6 million tags in operation, can help to ensure that any change in road transport pricing is implemented efficiently. The key to achieving this will be collaboration between government, regulators and the service suppliers on future cooperative intelligent transport systems.

Hyder Consulting's David Threlfall told the NeTC forum that factors encouraging governments to consider road pricing reform included:

- Closing the funding gap due to falling fuel duty.
- Providing a revenue stream to enable outsourcing of building and/or operating infrastructure.
- Influencing driving behaviour through:
  - Congestion charging.
  - Inter-urban driving behaviour.
- Raising money to pay for new infrastructure.

"Part of the solution to public acceptance of road use charges may be in linking the fees to specific propositions attractive to the community, such as reduction in fuel duty, ring fencing the revenue for transport investment, creating and communicating links to environmental advantages and local community benefits.

"Such solutions require a national or regional approach to avoid disadvantaging individual localities," said David Threlfall.

**Electronic vehicle registration identification**

A technical innovation which is attracting interest from government and regulators is Electronic Registration Identification (ERI), which uses electronic devices fitted to vehicles to store data that can be read from outside the vehicle. This concept can include a range of information, including engine and/or chassis number (VIN), registration number, and proof that vehicle tax, insurance, periodic inspection, etc are up to date.

Q-Free ASA's Runar Søråsen told Forum delegates this technology can also be used for infrastructure management tasks, such as road user charging and road access control. "Public authorities are exploring this concept to remove unregistered, uninsured, unsafe or stolen vehicles from roads," he said.

"ERI enables efficient roadside and periodic compliance control of vehicles using the roads, while reducing paper work and time spent checking a range of vehicle records. More time is spent on doing the control task," said Runar Søråsen.
Advanced electronic systems will be integrated to help manage traffic in the future.

THE FUTURE - INTEGRATED OPERATIONS

Further information:

Susan Harris  
Chief Executive Officer  
+61 (0)408 794 532

Peter Bentley  
Louben Consulting  
+ 61 (0)412 336 196

Barry Oosthuizen  
Media Advisor  
+61 (0)413 185 135

About ITS Australia

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