

/customer interview

Movenience: mobility as a service

Most drivers who use the Westerscheldetunnel automatically pay the toll by means of an in-car box, the t-tag. They can now also use the t-tag to pay at a number of car parks in Zeeland. If Movenience has any say in the matter, this will just be the start.

Movenience was set up in 2007 by the Dutch NV Westerscheldetunnel, infrastructure consultancy NedMobiel and the Portuguese toll company Brisa. The core activity of this young firm is handling car-related payments. "Our ambitions go further than just collecting tolls", explains Dirk Grevink, business development director of Movenience. "As well as tolls, you could use the t-tag to pay for parking, fuel and even a drive-in McDonald's meal. You have a box in your car; we make sure you can use it to pay for all kinds of things from a single account." In itself, electronic toll payment is nothing new; toll roads abroad have been using it for years. "But there is a big difference", emphasises Grevink. "For most toll operators, the in-car device is purely an instrument to collect their tolls. We want to use it to supply services to drivers."

European toll system

The company is looking forward to the impending European market for tolls and road pricing. This is currently fragmented, with many countries having several toll operators. These are the companies that own the roads. They build a road, get funding for it and generally earn their money from tolls. There are different systems in place for collecting tolls electronically that do not always work together. Partly for this reason, Europe has decided to separate the two: electronic toll payments will be independent of road ownership. Interoperability requirements will mean that drivers can use a single box to pay throughout Europe. The system is meant to be in place for freight traffic in September 2012 and for all traffic two years later. This will create a market for suppliers of European Electronic Toll Services (EETS providers). These companies will distribute boxes (On-Board-Units or OBUs) that meet the EU requirements and enter into contracts with customers (consumers, drivers).

"These service providers will also start collecting any road charges for the government. Movenience wants to do the same. You could compare it to telephone service providers. They give you a phone that will also work on different networks throughout Europe."

Partnership

"For us, the relationship with our customers, drivers, is key. That means custom solutions; we really want to offer our own product. If we buy an existing system, we are tied to the limiting conditions set by the supplier. However, we are too small to develop a system ourselves, so we went looking for a partner. Someone who understands road pricing, who is aware of what is happening in the European market and who knows about interoperability. Technolution has that knowledge and that is very important to us. There are many parties who claim to understand this area, but if you dig a little deeper, you quickly discover the limits to their knowledge."

TIPS

For the Westerscheldetunnel, Technolution developed the equipment that detects and classifies vehicles at the toll booths. Movenience subsequently asked Technolution to develop the Transaction and Information Processing System (TIPS). TIPS handles the electronic payments made using the t-tag. The great thing about this system is its simplicity, says Grevink: "Under the lid, TIPS is complex, but it is very well put together and the essence is simple. It supports our contract with the customer (driver); we have the t-tag which the customer uses to pay and we can make a link with companies (operators) that can supply services to the customer. It is transparent, straightforward and user-friendly for our helpdesk. We are very satisfied."



Photo above:
Dirk Grevink
Business Development
Director Movenience



At the kitchen table

In the run-up to the European market for tolls and road pricing, Movenience is participating in accessibility projects. An example is SpitsScoren, which tempts people to drive outside the rush hour by paying them five euros each time they do. “We can use the project to test out new technologies and principles. We will be looking at whether it works in technical terms, but also whether we can influence people’s behaviour. In order to achieve that, the technology needs to be simple and close to the user. We want to be sat at the kitchen table with our customers. That is where people make their decisions about how to travel, not when they are in their cars: by then, the choice has already been made. That is why SpitsScoren uses a smartphone that you can use at any time, wherever you are. The customer uses the device to indicate their travel plans for the day. The built-in GPS checks whether they actually do what they say they are going to do. That smartphone takes us very close to the customer.”

Smartphone as platform

“The smartphone is a great platform for new applications”, explains Grevink. “It means you are not dependent on the launch of new equipment for new services. Downloading an application on the smartphone is enough – to pay for car parking, for example. In the background, we make a link

between the parking payments system and our back office. That is another important aspect of TIPS: scalability. We can keep on making new interfaces which suppliers can link different systems to. That flexibility is quite unique in this field.”

Mobility as a service

It looks as though road pricing has been shelved again for political reasons. That is a shame, believes Grevink: “Mobility shouldn’t be an issue for the individual any more. As it stands, we spend a lot of time planning and making arrangements. Really, the whole mobility issue should be taken out of our hands. That way, road pricing becomes not a charge but a service. You want to make a journey by train or car and you pay by the mile to use that service. With the advent of user-friendly in-car payment systems, such as the t-tag, public acceptance of road pricing will increase. Projects such as SpitsScoren and SpitsMijden will also contribute to acceptance. I can imagine a scenario in which those projects get extended further and further and that road pricing is introduced on the back of them, perhaps as a regional charge initially. Road haulage could also be an important driver. Trucks already pay lots of small tolls across Europe. For them it makes things simpler if they can pay everything with one box.”

