UITP proposal on European journey planners

Response to the challenge launched by Vice-president Kallas, Commissioner for transport
Background

The ongoing discussion on European multimodal journey planners often neglects the specific conditions that are important to consider when introducing new information systems. There are some good examples that show the possibilities of such multimodal cross border information systems, for example the EU Spirit that has been operational for almost 10 years. But so far the public transport sector is waiting for more substantial support at European level to develop and implement more advanced pan-European solutions that are reliable and attractive. On 6 June 2011, Commissioner Siim Kallas presented in Lyon an initiative that will focus on the status of European journey planners. UITP supports a further development, but attention must be given to the specific rules and conditions for the public transport sector. In this memo, UITP presents a general position on a European approach to multimodal journey planners.

The public transport sector has long since developed attractive and advanced IT solutions for journey planning, including real-time information and fares. The travel information and journey planners that are successful today are all local, regional or national with responsibility taken by the local and regional (and sometimes national) authorities. Even if most journey planners are regional or national, cooperation on larger scale has existed for some time, for example EU-Spirit, which is an example of a successful operational solution.

The key questions when discussing journey planners focus on access to data and rules for reuse of data. The reason for this is that there is a need for a clear responsibility for information given as well as the absolute customer need for reliable and updated information. There is a clear need for a framework that is supported by the public transport sector including local, regional and long distance public transport, but that also supports attractive and user friendly solutions using different channels developed not only by the public transport sector, but also by third parties.

This paper presents a general position that could be a platform and starting point for the cooperation between the stakeholders within the public transport sector and application developers when developing pan-European information solutions.

Basic requirements for public transport information

Local and regional public transport covers more than 95% of all public transport trips and the needs of the local market have been and will be developed locally. The long distance traveler is also part of the local market, as every trip starts and ends locally. This means information for a long distance trip needs to include the local (last mile) information and should build on the local information already available, just as information on long distance trips (by rail, air and ferry) should build on the information from the operators of these services.

Customer needs must be the focus when presenting new information technologies. These needs can be summarised as follows:

Affordable solutions are a key factor: few are willing to pay for information that is seen as a part of the offer when travelling – information should be free or almost for free;

Accessible information available when you need it but only then...;

Reliable information that can be trusted;

Relevant information for the individual user;

Up-to-date information that gives the actual and relevant data available for any system.

These basic requirements are obvious but need special attention because the organisation and access to information also entails a need for a framework of responsibility and ownership of information or data.

The local and regional level will meet the local demand by own applications and also by third party applications. This is also important when presenting information on the last mile to the long distance traveler, as well as information to a user not locally based. If the new technique is to boost the use of public transport, there is a need for customised information that can be used even when a passenger is travelling outside their home region. And the new technique requires access to information that developers can use for customised information.
The UITP position presented in June 2010, as well as UITP’s response to the European Commission consultation on ‘Access to Traffic and Travel data’, focused on some important issues:

• Traffic and travel information data (time-table information and real-time data on traffic situation) held by operators and/or authorities is normally not used for commercial purposes and should be provided to ease and promote public transport usage;

• Data access and usage should be neutral and based on “rules of conduct” and contracts between the information supplier (Public transport operators/authorities) and the user (service provider) regulating the usage of information;

• Availability, quality and reliability of information have to be ensured and built on a common framework and clear responsibilities taking into full account Regulation (EC) 1370/2007. In the public transport sector, standards have already been developed to ensure quality and data availability;

• Open and neutral transport formats are vital for inter-modal travel planners that should be developed from a “bottom up” perspective;

• Integrated and multi-modal traffic and travel information systems/services should give priority to public transport usage;

• There is a need to encourage the establishment of a common framework and the development of a Travel Information Market (TIM).

TIM is aiming to realise the concept of seamless travel information through organising the availability of Travel Information by means of a Travel Information Market place in such a way that all stakeholders will have equal entry.

The UITP response to the consultation in May 2011 on journey planners, after comments from some members, also underlines the need to use (or reuse) existing local/regional/national information. This bottom up approach, which uses existing information sources that guarantee the quality of the information, is vital. This approach is supported by a majority of the stakeholders using a combination of decentralised methods and centralised databases for a region or a nation. The distributed approach should be used for the cooperation between these “regional or national databases” (independent databases which receive/send information using standard interfaces). This will also ensure the information covers all public transport within a geographical area. This also highlights the need for a standardised format – a neutral application programming interface (API) – and a common framework for access to information that could be used to extend information beyond the regional/national level by cooperation between public transport undertakings or by “third party applications”, also proposed by the EU TravelNet. The approach presented in the EU TravelNet proposal has strong support and is still valid to develop a pan-European journey planner that meets the core requirements on availability, quality and reliability of information.

UITP position – summary

UITP’s vision is that access to data should be organised bottom-up in a transparent way and that rules on the exchange with third parties should apply. The general position for cooperation at pan-European level should be based on these core statements:

Open access to information
Open access to information that is neutral and reliable must be supported but also controlled and must follow rules of conduct and a legal framework to prevent misuse of information.

Bottom up approach
The bottom up approach, which uses existing information sources that guarantee the quality of the information, is vital. A distributed approach should be taken using databases for a region or a nation to ensure the information covers all public transport within a geographical area. In addition, the information of long distance transport (rail, air and ferry) that is not included in national databases should use the databases of the long distance operators.
Standardised interfaces
There is a need for standardisation that is flexible to meet the variety of local solutions and systems developed locally. Standardisation must focus on standardised interfaces - APIs - that support the usage of correct information from the responsible level whether it is a local and regional level, a national level or an international level of information.

The information market has to be organised
Public transport information is a multi-source structure with information based on local information from operators, authorities, vehicles, infrastructure, and so on. The information is there but how does the customer get the information that he/she wants? And is the information reliable and up-to-date? If you are not aware of where to get information from, you are lost. And the same goes for smart applications. Information must be available and understood. And the information presented must be customised for certain situations and individual needs. All this will need a structured and standardised approach, organised in a ‘Travel Information Market’ that will support the industry when introducing new information services for the public. The Travel Information Market will guide users to the appropriate information sources and link information by standard APIs to the ‘end user applications’.

This approach is valid throughout all kinds of information on public transport - from the journey planner where the sector supports the decentralised approach, to the real-time information sent from either local information systems of directly from the vehicles or infrastructure. This bottom up approach and the use of local information available on line will ensure that information is reliable and up to date, which is of course key.

Actions needed
The national and regional solutions for travel information need to be supported but also developed further to establish voluntary agreements that will support a European framework that also includes all long distance services.

Actions are needed in two areas:

a/ Common framework and rules of conduct
There is a need for a common framework, agreed by the sector, setting the rules for use and reuse of data and information that guarantee the quality and reliability of the information given to the end user. This also requires a structured and standardised approach organised in a ‘Travel Information Market’ that will guide users to the appropriate information sources and link information to the customer by standard APIs.

b/ Standardised APIs
Standardisation is vital and needs to be flexible. The standard should meet the needs for collecting information using a bottom up and multi-source approach also open for third party applications. This standard could be developed within a European project taking on board the experiences from local and regional APIs used for third party applications.

Next step
A European initiative is very much welcomed and will be supported by UITP if it meets the basic requirements presented in this paper. UITP will contribute by organising a forum for exchange of knowledge and also support actions initiated by the EU Commission. The key for achieving the “true European approach” is in the hands of the EU, and UITP is waiting for further discussions to achieve a true pan-European approach.