

## ESP Systex looks to the future of ticketing systems

ESP Systex managing director Terry Dunn is looking ahead to the next stage for ticketing systems.

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Smartcards that do away with the need for paper tickets are no longer cutting-edge technology. The next stage, says Terry Dunn, is for cards to disappear as well and to be replaced by signals from mobile phones and personal digital organisers.

However, the real innovation will be securing sufficient co-operation so that such technology can be adopted on a widespread basis, creating a truly joined-up national system.

Mr Dunn, managing director at ESP Systex, a passenger transport smart cards specialist with 85 staff in Hull, does not underestimate the size of this task.



Looking ahead: ESP Systex managing director Terry Dunn

“Over the years, government-backed smartcard initiatives dealing with improving service delivery to the more vulnerable sectors of our society have had many false dawns,” he admits.

The main problem, he says, appears to be associated with thinking too narrowly and focusing on very specific problems that often don't offer sufficient payback for widespread adoption or long-term sustainability.

“The result is that many schemes with laudable objectives have simply fizzled out when funding has diminished,” he says.

Mr Dunn's background was in barcode printing before he decided to set up ESP Systex with colleague Robin Ellis back in 1994.

Since then, the firm has worked on projects including London's Oyster card and concessionary and then free local bus passes for old age pensioners and disabled people to use buses in England, Scotland and Wales.

Turnover was £8.3m last year, with more than half of this coming from its English bus smartcards venture, which helps provide cards for the nine million senior and disabled citizens who have been entitled to free local bus travel since April 2008.

The challenge, however, remains connecting smartcard technology to a range of other goals of ESP Systex's

public sector customers.

The business case for smartcards in mass transit, he says, focuses on fraud prevention, efficiency improvements, speed of boarding and better driver safety through a reduction of cash handling.

However, some schemes have accepted transit as smartcards' core function, while adding other "citizen" applications so that the cards can also be used in libraries, for cashless catering at schools and at leisure and health care facilities.

ESP Systex, which switched to Bank of Scotland Corporate in March 2008, has a pilot programme in North-West England to provide ticketing for buses via mobile phones, and Mr Dunn feels that the much-vaunted modern buzzword of "sustainability" has to be the key to the next wave of technology deployment.

Handled correctly, he says, joined-up use of smartcards could be linked to carbon reduction programmes, by their use on buses, trains and free bicycle rental schemes; to educational initiatives, such as combating truancy and to other challenges, such as coping with increased urbanisation and with the growing demand for safety and security.

"In terms of innovation," he says, "we're trying to influence the way that people think about solving these challenges in an integrated way."