

Rome was one of the eight cities involved in PRoGRESS, initially introducing a limited central-area access-controlled scheme which it is now expanding.
Photo: Petros Ieromonachou



CURAÇÃO – it's time for

David Crawford previews a brand-new European RUC project **CURAÇÃO**

With interest in urban road user charging (RUC) implementation rising steadily throughout Europe, a new EU-funded project makes a timely start this month. It aims to help cities that are considering charging schemes to make the maximum use of the current and past experience available across the continent – negative as well as positive.

CURAÇÃO (Coordination of Road User Charging Organisational Issues) – its logo incorporating the Central London Congestion Charging scheme 'C' symbol (and its title rather forcedly acronymised as the West Indies liqueur) – will focus on showing how RUC can and should work in practice. Scheduled to run for three years, it is being coordinated by UK-based Transport and Travel Research (TTR).

It will build on, and consolidate, results from previous rounds of EC-funded RUC-oriented projects PRoGRESS and CUPID, in both of which TTR were involved, and the Bristol (UK)-coordinated EUroPrice. But it plans to go much further.

'In practical terms,' says project manager Chris Humphrey, 'CURAÇÃO

aims to create the conditions for reaching the "tipping point" for the wide-scale adoption of road pricing in European urban centres. We are creating a user group of cities that have an interest in implementing RUC schemes, with key decision makers representing them.'

There is a practical limit – 20 – to the number of cities that will be able to join the user group. But there will be no set limit to the number of others that are being encouraged to benefit from CURAÇÃO's dissemination programme, using email and the website. The fact that it is not concerned with running demonstration projects is being seen as an advantage, in allowing more cities to be involved in its activities than was possible with previous projects.

CURAÇÃO hopes to create what Humphrey calls a 'confident consensus' among the cities that join the user group. Their decision makers, he says, will feel that they are 'among kindred-spirited representatives from a number of equivalent cities that are taking the right approach to solving a pressing issue that has local significance, but

also a national and European context'.

They will, for example, be offered a methodology for implementation designed to address the known barriers to the introduction of RUC, most notably in the choice of technology and the importance of gaining public acceptability. They will also be able to access expert support during implementation from other cities that have had similar experiences – including those that took part in PRoGRESS.

PRoGRESS (Pricing Road use for Greater Responsibility, Efficiency and Sustainability in cities) ran from 2000 to 2004. It involved eight cities – Bristol (UK, project coordinator), Copenhagen (Denmark), Edinburgh (Scotland, UK), Genoa (Italy), Gothenburg (Sweden), Helsinki (Finland), Rome (Italy) and Trondheim (Norway) – in demonstration or modelling exercises which, it was hoped, would lead to full-scale implementations in as many as five locations.

In the event, the results within the timescale fell short of these aspirations – largely for reasons of politics or public acceptance. Trondheim implemented a dedicated short-range communications

(DSRC)-based scheme (though it had a flying start in the form of its pre-existing toll rings) within a policy of funding transport improvements.

The project ended on 31 December 2005, by which time other Norwegian cities had taken up the baton. Discussions are under way on demand management-oriented applications, and drivers continue to use their on-board units (OBUs) to take advantage of the national AutoPASS system, introduced in 2001 as the Norwegian national standard for electronic fee collections (EFC).

Rome and Genoa introduced initially limited central-area access-control schemes. Both are now expanding, Genoa's within the EC-supported CIVITAS II CARAVEL project.

Copenhagen and Gothenburg ran major demonstrations of satellite-based charging technology – alongside a minor one in Bristol. All three schemes registered technical problems with accurate positioning in urban areas

Its 1991 BRITES modelling study found that a combination of RUC with light rapid transit would benefit both traffic flows and economic vitality in the city centre, and the work carried on through two EC-supported projects. The 1998 ELGAR (Environmentally Led Guidance And Restraint) found that drivers entering the city would increasingly change mode in response to rising charging levels, a result reinforced by the 2000 INTERCEPT (INTERmodal Concepts in European Passenger Transport) project.

The city included a possible central cordon-based charging scheme in its 2000, first-generation Local Transport Plan (LTP) – though stressing that it would not introduce charging without Government support for significant public transport investments. The lack of this, and a change in political control, ended the proposal.

The issue remains live, however. In July 2005, the provisional second-generation joint LTP for Bristol and three

charging cordon 'may now be of little practical use' to the enlarged geographical area, says Bristol Transport Initiatives' Steven Riley. But CURAÇAO will be able to recycle the results for the benefit of other cities in Europe.

The same applies to Edinburgh, whose dual-cordon scheme was ready to go live the day after a February 2005 referendum – which voted decisively against. It is likely to be some years before the Scottish capital finds the political will to revive the proposal.

In the meantime, however, says Alex Macaulay, project director of arms'-length agency Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (tie): 'we can make available our five years' experience of the relevant statutory processes, technology options and business systems needed.' tie will be doing this through its membership of the CURAÇAO consortium.

CURAÇAO will also be able to take on and develop key overall PROGRESS conclusions. Among these, Riley highlighted the importance of consultation and communication, to increase public acceptability, and the telling message that 'simplicity improves support', when he reviewed project achievements at the recent EU Road User Charging 2006 event in London.

There will be similar scope for the work of CUPID (Coordinating Urban Pricing Integrated Demonstrations), which set out to widen the pool of available knowledge on urban RUC and, specifically, support and evaluate PROGRESS and show how results could be implemented. Limited data availability, however, restricted its usefulness.

CURAÇAO will be free to collect or appraise data for key cities both inside and outside PROGRESS, including Stockholm (whose DSRC-based congestion charging scheme, now under way, goes to a referendum in Summer 2006),

the liqueur

(though Sweden rates the system as relevant for distance-based charging of heavy goods vehicles – but with major functional elements shifted from OBUs to off-board processing).

Post-PROGRESS discussions on congestion charging (using DSRC) continue in Gothenburg. Copenhagen has continued development work on DSCR as well as satellite-based options, but a political stand-off between the Danish Government and the city authority seems likely to delay progress until the next national elections in 2008.

Helsinki restricted herself to a modelling exercise, which indicated low levels of public acceptance. The Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications currently has no plans to introduce RUC in Helsinki or elsewhere – although, says Infrastructure Unit Director Mikko Ojajärvi: 'we are following with interest the current Swedish experiment' [ie congestion charging in Stockholm].

But neither of the two PROGRESS cities that initially seemed among the best placed for large-scale RUC implementation – Bristol and Edinburgh – in fact achieved it. Bristol, in particular, had an excellent pedigree, with a track record in RUC research dating back to the early 1990s.

neighbouring unitary (all-purpose) authorities included a range of funding options – including one of congestion charging and associated investment in transport infrastructure, which drew 62 per cent support in an associated public consultation.

The four authorities are now progressing research using pump-priming money from the UK Government's Transport Innovation Fund (see TEC January 2006). The decade or so of work invested on the Bristol city centre

The on-board unit used in Bristol's trial of satellite-based charging system.



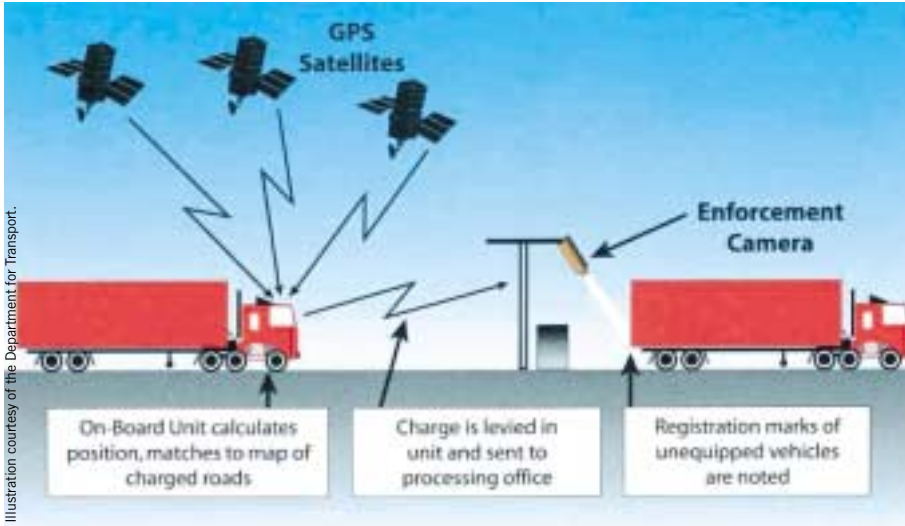


Illustration courtesy of the Department for Transport.

As part of PROGRESS, Bristol trialled satellite-based road user charging technology.

Oslo (Norway), Rome and London. Since CURAÇAO is not implementation-driven, says Humphrey, it can focus on each key stage in the process and tackle the barriers.

Again, CUPID's dissemination role was impeded by local political sensitivities. But Humphrey is confident that CURAÇAO will be less restricted by such issues, for three main reasons.

First, while successful implementation of RUC will normally have political implications, with sensitive underlying factors that it is important to monitor, project partners have progressed to a stage where these issues should not be a problem. CURAÇAO's objective overview of the implementation process should appear as a real benefit.

Second, CUPID was often unable to work directly with politicians or national governments because of overlaps with other projects including EU-RoPrice (whose work CURAÇAO will

also take on board) and too-frequent meetings. CURAÇAO plans a restricted number (no more than one a year) of high-interest political events.

Finally, CURAÇAO hopes to be less restricted by political issues as it is researcher-led. It will, says Humphrey, be managed so as to avoid political and institutional barriers likely to be met with in any particular location.

'Cities,' he says, 'want to learn from each other, and are reluctant to be lectured to by "experts". At the core of CURAÇAO will be case-study cities that offer substantial experience of RUC issues.'

The project will involve consultants who have worked with these cities, but the focus will be on taking advantage of their know-how, and avoiding theoretical issues. 'CURAÇAO will be end-user driven, and will review its work annually with end-users', he adds.

To reflect growing interest in the subject, CURAÇAO is widening the ge-

ographical boundaries of its predecessors, which concentrated on the UK, Italy and Scandinavia, where awareness of urban RUC was at its highest. It is introducing new partners from France, the Netherlands and the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, it is involving European cities and regions network POLIS, whose previous engagement was low-key because of demonstration-driven timetables. The presence of POLIS is intended to secure the interest of cities that have so far shown limited awareness of RUC.

One of the issues for CURAÇAO to consider will be the difference in national approaches as between EU Member States. The UK is, for example, unusual in pushing for full RUC implementation nationwide, with individual local authorities as stepping stones, while most mainland European activity focuses on initiatives taken by individual cities.

Stockholm, however, has already incorporated a national dimension, since its congestion charge counts legally as a national tax. At the same time, national lorry RUC schemes in operation in countries including Austria, Germany and Switzerland offer logical prospects of being extended to other vehicles in due course.

Concludes Humphrey: 'RUC is the demand management tool with the greatest potential for tackling the congestion and mobility issues experienced by cities at the beginning of the 21st century. It is also the most difficult to implement since it involves reconciling the interests of stakeholders, including suppliers, national and local governments, road users and citizens.'

The challenge he sees for CURAÇAO is to develop a generic urban blueprint that can serve as a catalyst and enabler for the deployment of road pricing in European cities.

Its two key elements will be:

- A clear implementation process that cities can follow; and
- A clear definition of the support structure they need during the process of implementation.

CURACAO plans to hold its launch event in Stockholm in Spring 2006. Further information is available by emailing curacao@ttr-ltd.com

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