

# Local anaesthetic

by Kevin Borrás

*Smart.Traffic 2002, organised by Brisbane-based Transport Roundtable Australasia and held in its attractive home city at the end of July, has emerged as a stand-out conference in an overcrowded circuit. Focusing on 'Operations and Partnerships', not only did the speakers stick to the theme, the mainly home-grown presentations provided fresh, interesting takes on peculiarly Australian issues...*

**A**s editor of *TTi*, I get invited to speak at conferences all over the world. Time restrictions mean that I have to turn down the majority of the offers, but accepting Asia-Pacific Correspondent Phil Sayeg's invitation to attend and present at *Smart.Traffic 2002* (22 and 23 July), organised by Transport Roundtable Australasia, the organisation he runs with fellow *TTi* contributor Prof Phil Charles, proved to be one of my smarter moves, if you excuse the pun.

In my four years with the magazine I have attended dozens of conferences, and the more I go to, the more disillusioned with the circuit I become. The same people giving the same presentations to the same audience with, predictably, the same results. In one case I saw the same presentation given by the same person 19 months after I saw it the first time. *Smart.Traffic* promised to be different, and I am happy to report that it was.

Held in the sumptuous surroundings of the Brisbane Marriott hotel, *Smart.Traffic 2002* kicked off with one

of the four non-Australian papers (of the 24 presented, 20 were from an Australian perspective), a study of European trends and challenges from the avuncular Dr Gerd Bahm, project director of VMZ Berlin, the German capital's Daimler-Chrysler Services-run traffic management centre. Bahm explored the reasons behind the enormous growth in European traffic levels, both demographically and culturally. The financial growth of the five Central and East European countries awaiting entry into the EU, most notably Slovenia, is set to further test the capacity of the European road network.

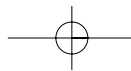


*Left to right: Prof Phil Charles and Phil Sayeg of Transport Roundtable Australasia, with Gary Linton, CEO of conference sponsors, SAAB ITS Pty Ltd*

Structural changes in national, EU and global economies coupled with the liberalisation of EU transport markets, said Bahm, are two of the major reasons for the rapid expansion of transportation needs. Bahm's solution: the introduction of a charge for the use of infrastructure.

The two highlights from day one were Dr John Cox's study of 'Emerging transport challenges for Australia' and Tyco's Des Dent's look at design issues relating to the smart public transport systems. According to Cox, the motor vehicle is just eight years away from reaching its peak use in Australia, when air travel and 'other means of e-communication' will begin to play the more dominant role. "Australia is becoming increasingly involved in a new, globalised information-based economy where demand growth rates for intranational movement of goods and people are falling and the faster increases in transport demand are between countries."

Transport issues and challenges facing Australia, while although comparable to those in North America and Northern Europe, are actually unique in terms of the country's geography and climate. T



## conference report

vast majority of the 20 million population (in a country not much smaller than the USA, which is home to 13 times as many people) is crammed into just eight cities (Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart). Logistically, the country is a transport nightmare ... with such huge distances between the major cities (look at an atlas and see for yourself how long a road trip would take between Darwin and Brisbane), Cox's main points are easy to understand. "The challenges facing road transport," he concluded, "are those facing a mature transport mode that is being acted upon by new communication and information technologies and faster transport modes."

### By design, rather than luck

Des Dent, Tyco Electronics Project Group's traffic and transport manager,

City Council (BCC), given by Councillor Maureen Hayes, BCC's transport and major projects chair, was a fascinating insight into how the city is shaping up to meet the community's requirements. "Many of the initiatives derived from the theme of an accessible city go beyond current funding limitation and conventional thinking," she said. "Innovation is a key tool in delivering this vision, whether it is innovation in design, systems or indeed funding the future." A second career as a stand-up comedian awaits Cllr Hayes should she feel the need to change direction.

### More of the same

Day two began with what can only be described as a blast from the past. Eschewing 21st century presentation technology, Derek Scrafton, professor of transport and planning at the University

cared for, the demand for mobility is secondary. This is all the more reason to ensure that planning, funding and decision-making on transport matters is honest, rigorous and transparent. If AusLink can improve these processes it deserves serious consideration by all involved in transport in Australia."

Andrew Garrett, managing director of Intelligent Transport Specialists gave thorough presentation of Adelaide's ne real-time passenger information system. The South Australian capital is home to the world's longest high-speed guided bus way, the O-Bahn, but the state is one of the country's least wealthy, with public transport consistently competing for affection (in the form of funding) with other transport initiatives, law and order, security, education and health. "South Australia has consistently embraced innovation in public transport as long as it delivers customer satisfaction, operating efficiencies and external benefits," explained Garrett. "The objectives of the RTPI project are to improve public transport services by demonstrating the use of ITS comprising vehicle detection, communication and computer technology."

Among these objectives are real-time bus arrival and schedule adherence information for both passengers and drivers, and intelligent bus priority using Adelaide's SCATS system. "The bottom line objectives are to provide a demonstrable improved service, improved patronage and the delivery of business efficiencies to the operators and agencies."

The three-stage contract, awarded to Tyco Integrated Systems in June and originally confined to 35 fully-equipped buses, 35 passenger information display at selected bus stops and 10 key sets of traffic signals for bus priority, is due for completion in May 2003. If it proves to be as successful as Garrett and Transport South Australia believe it will, it could, funding provided, be expanded to include 900 buses, 1,000 passenger info signs and 400 sets of traffic signals.

Transport Roundtable Australasia have a motto: Understanding tomorrow transport challenges. On this evidence, would be an extremely challenging task to disprove their claim. ■

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Smart.Traffic 2002, visit the Web site [www.transportroundtable.com.au](http://www.transportroundtable.com.au)  
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## "The challenges facing Australia, while comparable to those of North America and Northern Europe, are unique in terms of the country's geography and climate"

drew on his 40-plus years of experience in the field of designing smart systems for public transport and buses to survey the "landscape surrounding the concept of systems that claim to be smart and the concept of IQ-related to design complexity, user friendliness and cost for a large fleet of public transport vehicles".

Dent's current work with Smartbus in Melbourne and a real-time passenger information system (RTPI) in Adelaide, led him to conclude that the evolution of RTPI systems in Australia "has been facilitated by the active cooperation between the government and the private sector. The complex interaction between technical and human factors, the experimental nature of innovations, the capability of reversing direction where problems have been identified and the synergy generated by interaction between diverse groups have been testament to successful system deployments." Dent added that the recently completed pilot Smartbus System in Melbourne was a perfect example of operational partnering ventures.

A highly entertaining perspective on the trends and challenges facing Brisbane

of South Australia, backed up his blunt yet heartfelt speech about a new Federal Government transport initiative, AusLink, with an old-fashioned overhead projector and simply laid out transparencies. English-born Scrafton, who held the 'sometimes thankless' post of director-general of transport for South Australia from 1972-1997 is fully supportive of the motives behind AusLink, namely to reform planning and financing of transport infrastructure, but is wary of the possibility that a poorly-directed scheme could become a "patently uneconomic addition to Australia's transport infrastructure".

"However ineffective roads' contribution may be to improved accessibility, they and other transport improvements are still a better use of public funds than sports stadia, wine centres, arts grants and numerous other responses to wants, desires and aspirations. On the other hand," he concluded, "however much we think transport is important, it is second division when compared to health, education and welfare. Without a healthy, educated community that cares and is

