

The Traveller Information Services Association (TISA) held its inaugural General Assembly on 21 November 2007 at Deutsche Telekom AG in Berlin, Germany. The newly established not-for-profit company (ASBL under Belgian law) will ensure an international framework for market-driven, coordinated, proactive implementation of traffic and travel information services and products based on existing standards such as RDS-TMC and TPEG. It will also work towards the development of future standards and services.

TISA will take over the activities undertaken by the TMC Forum, the TPEG Forum and the German Mobile.Info project. It will also support standards that provide elements or a framework for services and products covering traffic and travel information including roads, public transport and related information needs such as points of interest, weather and environmental data.

At this point, a short history lesson is in order for anyone not familiar with these organisations. Founded in 1997 to represent all sectors in the development and roll-out of RDS-TMC services and products following their initial development in European Commission funded projects, the TMC Forum supports both commercial businesses and public authorities. It acts as the “keeper” of the TMC Standards and supports working groups and task forces to further develop all aspects of TMC. From the early days of technical development, the TMC Forum has now successfully created a truly global industry.

TPEG development commenced in 1998, driven by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and its partners. The TPEG Forum started in 2002, and published its first standards through ISO in 2004. The TPEG Forum has had membership across the value chain, and beyond the initial standards has continuously worked on upgrades (e.g. TPEG-LRC) and the development of new applications (e.g. TPEG-TEC) bringing TPEG closer to large scale implementation.

The German Mobile.Info project, led by BMW, has over the past two years defined a set of commercial services based upon the best of TMC and TPEG capabilities which would be suitable for the first major European TPEG services.

In October 2004, the TMC Forum, TPEG Forum and Mobile.Info project created the Road Traffic Information Group as a cooperation of the three organisations. The Road Traffic Information Group's goals have been to:

- ensure a single, market led technology emerges
- build on the synergies of the two Forums and the Mobile.info project
- utilise the best of both technologies

The Road Traffic Information Group has achieved improved requirements definition for developers and implementers.

The benefits of this cooperation highlighted the value of a more concrete joint activity. In creating and working jointly in a new single market-driven organisation, the aims and objectives of the traffic information industry will be achieved more effectively, through creating synergy among previously separate member organisations, exploiting the best of TMC and TPEG as technologies, providing a single platform to openly discuss new requirements, creating and maintaining a market focus and ensuring one consistent set of standards for the future.

Traveller information services have come a long way from the spoken radio and television bulletins available before TMC. Through widespread TMC services supported by sophisticated floating vehicle and floating cellular data as well as fixed-sensor data, police and other incident reports, motorists in many countries worldwide enable their navigation systems to warn them of, and dynamically re-route them around, traffic congestion or other road problems and hazards.

In addition to in-vehicle traffic information services broadcast using TMC or delivered via one-to-one communications such as GPRS, travellers today have a wide variety of information at their fingertips. For example, look at the right city on Google Maps and you can see a live traffic feed as well as a rough estimate of the travel time impact of traffic when a route is planned. Already available widely through traditional web access, services such as this are becoming more widely available through web-enabled mobile devices such as 3G telephones, some with GPS capability. It is clear that a forward looking organisation supporting traveller information needs not to be tied to a specific technology or communications medium, for many of the key requirements for providing good information to travellers are common across technologies and bearers.

One of the key benefits of TMC is that it is language-independent and, as far as possible, universal. A driver from one country can take their navigation system to another country and receive local traffic information in their own language. TPEG will also facilitate the same language-independent utility.

The international framework provided by TISA is necessary to align developments between markets and make products universal - without the international support already provided by the TMC Forum we would see a patchwork of different standards, requiring manufacturers to make dedicated products for each market (and therefore probably not supporting smaller markets) or include multiple tuners and protocols in devices, significantly increasing their cost and complexity. TISA intends to take this international outlook to the next level. Strong involvement from not only Europe but also the Americas, Asia and Australasia will ensure TISA remains relevant to a wide range of markets with different but complementary backgrounds and requirements.

TISA aims to continue the current successes of implementing successful standards such as TMC and TPEG in new markets such as China, with huge potential and their own unique requirements. These requirements can be technology-driven, society-driven or policy-driven. For example Scandinavian countries are highly motivated to provide public services for traveller safety, whereas markets such as the USA focus more on value-added services with comfort and convenience aims such as travel time calculation. Some countries focus on the motorist whereas others seek to give comprehensive multi-modal and public transport information. TISA recognises these different requirements. There will not be an attempt to apply a single inflexible solution to a variety of situations, rather to capitalise on similarities and support interoperability of services and devices to give the best support for the 'end customer': the traveller.

The community represented in the TMC Forum covers the whole traffic information service chain - service providers, content providers, device manufacturers, broadcasters, governments and car manufacturers among others. The TPEG Forum brings strong public broadcaster support and the considerable involvement of committed technical developers such as Korean companies instrumental in bringing innovative DMB and other mobile services to market. The Mobile.Info project highlights the importance of strong backing from the motor industry, and TISA is

highly aware of the need to work on a market-driven basis. The wide range of organisations represented within TISA gives an excellent opportunity to reconcile commercial factors such as the perceived value of consumer products and services, with the wider considerations of interoperability and support for policy-driven measures such as the encouragement of multimodal transport through the provision of good supporting information services. Only an organisation with this wide remit could address the vision of door-to-door travel not only guided but connected in real time, across travel situations, transport modes and even countries.

So, how to achieve this vision? TMC already gives us traffic incidents and road conditions, including congestion delays, for the main road network including cities.

TPEG applications with on-the-fly location referencing can take advantage of the larger bandwidth of digital broadcasts to give full road network coverage (or at least, as full as the coverage of source data, another area for development) and dedicated support for travel times.

The TPEG toolkit and further applications under development have the potential to support public transport and multi-modal travel information. Another challenge will be supporting the cross-modal link in real time. How to match up, for example, car and train segments? Is the park-and-ride parking area full?

Emerging technologies will be another source of potential developments. Cooperative vehicle-infrastructure systems developed in the ERTICO-coordinated CVIS project will allow vehicles to cooperate directly with other nearby vehicles, and with the immediate roadside infrastructure, thus sharing information on incidents, road hazards and the latest traffic information for greater safety, efficiency and a better environment. Each equipped vehicle will be able to connect and communicate via local ad hoc networks of vehicles and roadside equipment in the vicinity as well as via an always-on network connection for accessing a wide range of journey support and other services, for example using the CALM concept developed in ISO TC 204 WG16. TISA will bring the expertise of the traffic and travel information industry to support the deployment of services which exploit these advances in cooperative systems to transform the potential benefits into real market-driven traffic and travel services.

However, all this potential for new services will not distract TISA from a fundamental role of continuing the support for TMC and TPEG deployment provided by the TMC and TPEG Forums. The deployment of TMC services for new markets has gained momentum in new regions globally in recent years, and remains very relevant for some broadcast and transport environments. TPEG service standardisation work and new service identification requires ongoing support and conditional access and on-the-fly location referencing techniques need implementation support and administration.

With all these ongoing tasks, and the longer-term vision, the need for, and potential of, the Traveller Information Services Association is clear. Let's get this (travel info) show on the road!