

Interoperable Electronic Tolling for Europe's Roads

Imagine driving from Sweden to Spain and never having to stop to pay a toll. That scenario could soon become a reality thanks in part to the work of PISTA, which has validated a new European standard for interoperable electronic fee collection (EFC) systems.

([PRWEB](#)) November 4, 2004 -- Through trials in seven European countries, the IST project has proven the practicality of toll road operators applying the CEN 278 interoperability standard to EFC systems, which allow drivers to pay tolls electronically through the use of tags in their vehicles that communicate with roadside antennas.

“EFC technologies are very mature, but the problem has been a lack of standardisation,” explains Rafael Fando, the PISTA project manager at Cintra in Spain. “Toll road operators in different countries have used different, incompatible technologies, meaning that an EFC user in one country cannot use their tag to pay tolls in another country.”

The CEN 278 standard overcomes that problem by ensuring all EFC systems are compatible with each other. “Basically we tested what it takes to make the standard work,” Fando says.

The 12-month trials by 17 toll road operators in Sweden, Denmark, Spain, France, Greece, Italy and Portugal proved that through the incorporation of new EFC systems and the adaptation of existing ones full technological interoperability can be achieved.

That, however, is only part of the problem.

“Besides technological interoperability, it is also necessary to ensure contractual interoperability so users’ banks accept charges from tolls in other countries,” notes Fando. “That is a slower process, although during the course of the project progress has been made.”

All EFC systems on Spanish toll roads are now interoperable at a national level from a contractual viewpoint, with Portugal and France also expected to implement contractual interoperability with Spain, creating a cluster of compatible EFC systems on toll roads in south-western Europe. A similar cluster is being set up in Scandinavia. “Eventually we expect all of these systems to become interoperable across Europe, with the ultimate aim being to achieve free-flowing traffic on all toll roads so users never have to stop,” the project manager says.

Interoperability will allow toll roads to handle more traffic more efficiently “EFC systems can process 1,000 vehicles per hour, as opposed to 250 per hour with manual systems” while increasing the comfort of users and reducing congestion.

“With five or six million tags currently in cars across the EU, the number of potential beneficiaries from interoperability is huge,” Fando notes.

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Source: Based on information from PISTA

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