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[Johannesburg, 9 October 2007] - Putco's new on-bus smart card and global positioning (GPS) technology will provide the company with a streamlined means of tracking its transport activities.

According to Putco MD Franco Pisapia, the system will provide detailed data on passenger behaviour and popular routes. The integrated GPS will also assist in fleet management and prevent commuters from taking incorrect routes.

The solution, developed by Questek Transit Technologies, was installed on 350 buses at the Soweto depot for the pilot programme.

Speaking at the pilot project launch yesterday, Pisapia said: "The entire solution gives us more control over revenue management and more efficient fare collection. The GPS technology will provide valuable insight into driving patterns and driver behaviour."

He said the implementation of the solution costs around R30 000 per bus. "Our ultimate goal is to implement the system in our entire fleet of 1 750 busses, which we hope will happen in the not too distant future."

Finding direction

Ronald Salis, GM of Questek, said the integrated GPS system has dual value for Putco. "Tracking is one aspect, another is passenger management."

He said the GPS will check the position of the bus in relation to the commuter's particular route ticket. If the person is on the wrong route or at the wrong stop, the passenger and driver will be notified.

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The smart cards, which can be recharged with a weekly, monthly or seasonal ticket, are available from Putco's Soweto operations and mobile vendors at R30 each.

“The system is contactless, so passengers will pay the ticket price and present the card near the reader for it to load,” said Salis.

He said a similar reader is installed on the busses and commuters will only need to wave the card near the reader for the ticket to work. “The system also allows for cash exchanges on the bus for those commuters who have not yet moved over to the new card system.”

According to Salis, Questek will be involved in educating drivers and commuters on how the new system works. “It is an easy process, because it is not very different from the cash system that has already been in place.

Beyond 2010

“In line with government's ideals, we would like to see standards developed for the integration of this kind of system throughout SA's transport systems, which would be a boon for 2010,” said Salis.

However, councillor Rehana Moosajee, member of the mayoral transport committee for the City of Johannesburg, said upgrades of this kind should be assessed beyond the 2010 perspective.

“Upgrades to public transport systems should not be because we have an international event coming to our shores, but because we need to provide better service to South Africans.”

Moosajee said she envisages a dramatic change in the country's public transportation. “We are on the brink of a revolution in public transport in SA, and the Putco launch provides the building blocks for this to happen.”