

Introduction to the PRT Section

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The highly innovative and disruptive idea of PRT – Personal Rapid Transit – is presented in Lawson's paper in this issue of *Teletronikk*.

Its close relation to ITS, understood as means to make transport more cost-efficient, accessible and less dangerous to humanity, should be evident from Lawson's paper.

Ed Anderson, the grand old man of PRT has through his extensive production of papers related to the design of the various elements of PRT systems, theoretical studies as well as pedagogical notes created much of the foundation on which the whole concept is founded. As defined by the design criteria set forth by Anderson, PRT has been wished, planned and promised for years by the most respected and experienced people in public transport. The literature is truly overwhelming. Public transport systems with several of the PRT design criteria have also been developed, designed, implemented and tested, with success in some respects, failures and revisions in others.

In spite of massive efforts no true PRT has materialised in any full-scale working facility in public service. Many stories could be told to explain this fact, not the least about political plays, unrealistic enthusiasm, the "not-invented-here" syndrome as well as the co-operative traditions within transport and its commercial and professional legacy.

In many respects similar stories could have been told from the early days of the steam engine, the automobile, the telephone, and from the shift from the now 150 year old technology and business models of telephony circuit switching to packet switching – the basis for Internet.

The papers in this section are all about or related to PRT. Together with Lawson's paper in the previous section, they hopefully relay to the interested reader the relevance of PRT within a general perspective of ITS. They should serve to demonstrate that PRT is a field within ITS where much of the telecom and IT competencies on networks, routing and control systems can be applied, and that the parallels between PRT and telecom may be stronger than perceived at first sight.

Business boundaries and the perceived core competencies of companies are constantly being redefined by the impact of ICT. However, the

impact of ICT also seems to hold the promise of converting PRT from vision to practical solution.

The present papers should show that there are still practical and theoretical challenges, which is the flip side of the coin: The challenges still to be solved are exactly why the field of PRT still is innovative and offers entrepreneurial opportunities in the service of business as well as urban well-being.

The papers you find in this section were compiled and/or written during the fall 2002. Telenor's engagement in PRT since then has changed considerably: Through a Letter of Intent signed March 2003, Telenor, together with Norwegian industrial partners (Statkraft SF and Interconsult AS) and the Korean steel corporation POSCO Group Ltd, has stated its intentions to take part in the option rich development of an international Joint Venture company – with the purpose of developing a PRT system and build international business within PRT. At the moment of writing, a first phase Design and Engineering study has developed the basis for the detailed engineering works and control systems development, including the build of a test track, to be carried out in the second phase Design and Engineering during second half of 2003, but the transition to Second phase has still not been taken. The strategy behind involves the Fornebu area future public transport system, where Telenor – with its headquarters in the area – has a particular (in-)vested interest. A PRT system installed in the area where Telenor has its headquarters would not only be attractive for Telenor as a property developer and industrial engine, but a market opener world-wide – and make the advantages of comfortable, fast and toxic emission free public transport highly visible.

In a world where environmental problems abound in all cities, and traditional public transport seems unable to cope with it costwise as well as to users' attraction, the business of applying modern networks philosophy within public transport seems a promising case. That task cannot be done without simultaneously harvesting the beneficials of ICT development. Also, if we are right in the view that the core of ITS is also the core of telecom to be, the business case of PRT is not strictly about PRT alone, but about building new core competence for future ICT business and business development.