

‘We have offered the market innovative solutions aimed at the future of ticket sales, traffic monitoring and fleet management’

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Alexander Giegerich, ATRON Group Sales Director / PD

Alexander Giegerich, Atron Group Sales Director, on global trends in the public transport industry, the modern technological products they create and the successful appearance at the IT Trans 2022 fair.

After the corona crisis brought public passenger transport systems to an historic challenge, the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and the explosion of fuel prices have again brought the model into focus.

How much technology can help make urban mobility as efficient as possible and what are the trends in the European Union and the world in this regard, we talked to Alexander Giegerich, Sales Director of the German Atron Group, which is also present in Croatia.

The Covid19 crisis has had a strong impact on mobility and, in particular, on the public passenger transport industry. How is this bridged by market innovations that are adapted to the crisis itself and the new conditions?

Most of the restrictions in place during the corona crisis have now been lifted. We currently have no restrictions on the markets in which we are present and public passenger transport is returning to normal. Our customers now have to make up for certain work activities and lagging behind in projects and invest heavily in the replacement and purchase of new equipment as well as software solutions.

When it comes to software solutions, the increased demand is related to the increasing volume of public transport in cities and regions with a focus on highly changing requirements on the part of the contracting authority. Services are increased or decreased in short terms.

This requires very flexible solutions when it comes to traffic monitoring and control systems and the preparation of timetables by suppliers such as Atron.

At the IT Trans 2022 fair, Atron presented contemporary models of ticket collection – the way from paper ticket, through digital, to virtual. Can you tell us more about that?

I spoke about the consistent improvement of public transport, which will enable all passengers to purchase travel tickets for bus and train travel in the simplest way. What Atron has achieved in Germany is excellent results on several pilot projects for simpler tariff union solutions, projects in capitals with ID-based ticketing and, of course, in the meantime, very significant success of eTicketing projects in Germany.

In any case, the purchase of tickets in most cases does not yet take into account the needs of customers, i.e., does not facilitate the purchase process itself. We need a change to reduce the dominance of purchasing travel tickets in cash. In addition, the share of sales of paper tickets should also be reduced.

Travelers must be offered an alternative to paper tickets. It is also necessary to facilitate access for passengers who rarely use public transport, as well as for passengers coming from other cities and regions and from foreign countries.

Atron continuously offers modern solutions that set trends for public transport. The combination of modern solutions will result in the optimisation of the process for selling tickets without barriers, without cash and paper in all regions. Atron is part of this modernization.

What novelties do Atron's solutions and products presented at the fair offer?

Under the motto "We speak public transport", the Group presented solutions at the IT-Trans 2022 conference focused on the future of ticket sales, traffic control technology, fleet and depot management, as well as ancillary services.

All disciplines are perfectly networked with each other, and other companies' solutions can be easily integrated thanks to open interfaces. In the ticket section, Atron introduced a completely newly developed cashless vending machine for electronic and paper tickets. With two integrated printing units, this ticket machine is extremely easy to maintain and compact and is perfect for use on buses and trains.

In the stationary external version, it can also be used as a 24/7 sales channel in customer centers or on very frequent railway platforms and bus stations. The 10" display not only allows for quick selection of tickets, but also serves as a screen for passengers to be informed about vehicle arrivals and departures in real time.

The ticket is issued electronically (VDV-KA, Atron Token Ticket, SwissPass) or as a paper ticket. Cashless payment is enabled by an integrated EMV reader (Europay, Mastercard, Visa). New e-ticket solutions increase travel comfort for passengers and free drivers from ticket sales.

The new Atron validator complements the e-ticketing portfolio as an even more compact variant of the sales device. This solution can be used to control the entry of passengers as well as to sell e-tickets.

The latest generation of validators quickly and reliably read contactless e-cards, EMV cards, smartphones and token cards according to different standards. COVID-19 traveler confirmations can also be verified on the vehicle's PC or via the Android-based ticket control app.

In the field of season ticket sales, Atron's subsidiary Digital Data Systems GmbH (DDS) presented solutions so that pupils, students, companies and individual passengers can efficiently obtain their subscription tickets.

A range of subscription solutions are offered with web-based interfaces and modules for customer centers to a comprehensive management service. With secure web portals and ordering channels from Atron and DDS, individual and large customers always have control over their contracts and can access the necessary lists and forms at any time. In addition to freeing up staff from control and verification tasks, modern and online solutions ensure a positive experience for season ticket buyers.

In the field of operational management technology, Atron has demonstrated innovative management center solutions for dispatchers and user information centers, with a browser-based interface and innovations in operational management and passenger information.

Possible uses range from the automated control centre to the urban variant with extensive functions for dispatchers. To further increase passenger comfort, the passenger information area has been expanded with our partner company's infotainment module.

As a highlight in fleet and depot management, the Atron on-board computer can transfer the current state of the vehicle to the depot while driving, without driver interaction, allowing safe and autonomous operation.

Vehicle status data such as oil temperature and tank or battery charge level are also available to operators in depots. Reliable and contactless transmission of all relevant fleet data enables predictable maintenance and thus reduces repair and operation costs.

Atron's e-travel account relieves the driver and the administration of the transport company. Thanks to this modern software solution, the time-consuming and error-prone manual handling of travel orders has stopped. Requests for tax credits can be created by pressing the button.

No additional devices or applications or manual data entry is required. In addition to saving on work, the system guarantees the accuracy and consistency of the data.

Can you tell us a few words about IT Trans 2022 – general trends in the public passenger transport sector, how satisfied are you with Atron's performance, and how do you see the success of the conference and fair after the Covid 19 break?

We are very satisfied with IT Trans 2022 for a number of reasons. After a long pause, it was good for both parties, customers and suppliers. Again, we were able to speak directly with existing and potential users of our services, transport companies, representatives of local governments and authorities from the passenger transport sector.

Positive trends will continue when it comes to public passenger transport. The next fair where Atron participate is Inno Trans 2022, which will soon be held in Berlin where we opened a new office.

What are your challenges in the light of the Ukrainian crisis – procurement of electronics, chips, components, cables, as well as delivery deadlines and fulfillment of contractual obligations?

The Atron Group as well as its subsidiaries and subcontractors are not active in Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

Software and hardware development takes place at our locations in Markt Schwaben (Germany) and Bronschhofen (Switzerland). We source components from all over the world, making us less dependent on individual suppliers.

However, we are facing problems related to delivery deadlines, which is unfortunately a problem of the world economy. As a precaution, last year we filled our warehouses with stock of critical components and spare parts.

How do you see the sector in which you operate developing in the coming period, especially with the expected implementation of e-mobility and autonomous vehicles?

E-mobility in buses will continue to be affirmed, mainly in urban transport. This requires special vehicle monitoring tools such as those developed by Atron in the field of fleet management.

These are flexible adjustments to the vehicle type or constant monitoring by the dispatcher and depot staff of the remaining range with a certain battery capacity.

