

Thomas Müller, Sales Director at ATRON electronic GmbH:

The future lies in interconnected solutions

We are hopeful that the delay due to the coronavirus crisis and the earthquake in Zagreb will not disrupt the plans to equip the entire ZET fleet with new on-board computers in two years



Thomas Müller is the Sales Director for the ATRON Group, which has been cooperating with the Zagreb Electric Tram (ZET) for about fifteen

years. He has had the role of consultant, project manager and sales engineer in the utility and transport sectors with an insight into the European and international markets. From the office in Switzerland, he explains, among other things, what changes the coronavirus crisis has brought to the smart city market.

• How did ATRON cope with the coronavirus pandemic? Are your services and products being upgraded in line with epidemiologic measures?

– We have paid the most attention to the health and safety of our employees. ATRON has offices in Germany, Croatia, Sweden, Switzerland and the Czech Republic, which had to comply with instructions from their governments and local regulations. Our internal instructions included respecting social distance, as well as hygiene measures. Therefore, we promoted work from home whenever it was possible, and took turns in offices in order to reduce possible threats to our employees and ensure business continuity. During the most difficult days of the pandemic, we were banned from traveling to foreign countries, and travel to all countries where our offices are was allowed only in emergencies. We used video calls as much as possible in various situations, even in public procurement processes, which was not possible in the past. For customers and users of our systems, we introduced activities to help them adapt to the current situation. Those include additional consultations, timetable

changes, disabling of certain functions due to local regulations, or implementation and adaptation of existing solutions in a relatively short period of time.

• What is your assessment, what will happen in public transport due to changes caused by the health and economic crisis?

– We are currently witnessing somewhat delayed projects as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, new tenders are being adjusted, at times even cancelled due to new regulations and adaptations to new restrictions in public transport. Therefore, we see a lot of changes compared to the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also adapting to the solutions that are now imposed by the public and entities related to public transport, such as cashless payments, self-service, ticket sales via the Internet and applications. We have been close to finding solutions for quite some time. We have been actively developing them, and they are already ready to be offered to potential customers.

• You are a partner of the public transport company Zagreb Electric Tram (ZET). What kind of solutions do you offer in Zagreb and on the entire Croatian market?

– ATRON is dedicated to the now 15-year-long cooperation with Zagreb's ZET. After the installation of our first fleet monitoring and management system, its upgrade and modernization are still ongoing. Initially, we equip all new ZET's vehicles with our new on-board computers of the AVG (ATRON *vehicle gateway*) and AVT (ATRON *vehicle terminal*) series. We are hopeful that the delay due to the

coronavirus crisis and the earthquake in Zagreb will not disrupt the plans to equip the entire ZET fleet with our new on-board computers in two years. Additionally, we would transfer data communication from the TETRA system, which will be used exclusively for voice-activated communication in the future, to the GSM/LTE mobile radio network. The project itself foresees the upgrade of the TETRA system, as well as the delivery of new information screens to passengers in vehicles. Surely enough, we are active on the Croatian market, as well as on those of neighbouring countries, and we offer said information to passengers and our ticket payment system in addition to the traffic monitoring and control system.

• Based on your experience in different markets, what kind of new solutions can improve public transport?

– We see opportunities in interconnected solutions; from individual to smart and connected real-time solutions. It is not just about smart solutions that will be used by transport companies, but the entire city becoming a smart city. Telemetry data on the vehicle on sections are sent in real time, not only to the the dispatch centre, but also to the vehicle depot that has the right tools and experts prepared to process the data when the vehicle arrives to their location in the evening. What is more, there is real-time information on vehicle position, not only for dispatchers, but for passengers as well (e.g. displays and applications), or real-time ticket information forwarded from the ticket sales department. Open interfaces and standards support such movements – as our motto says: “Smart solutions for a better future”.