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BOOK REVIEW

Bob McQueen, Rick Schuman, and Kan Chen. "Advanced Traveler Information Systems." *Artech House ITS Library. Boston and London: Artech House, 2002. ISBN 1-58053-133-4.*

'Advanced Traveler Information Systems'

by Bruce Goldberg

In *Advanced Traveler Information Systems* (ATIS), Bob McQueen, Rick Schuman, and Kan Chen have made a noteworthy attempt at a blueprint for exploring the possibilities offered by deploying information technology to deliver real time information to travelers. The authors have clearly set out to write the textbook (figuratively and literally) for "ATIS 101," and they generally hit their target.

The book is aimed at a wide audience, including academia, researchers, transportation planners, industry personnel, policy makers, and potential investors in commercialized ATIS. As a result, different parts of the book will be of primary interest to different audiences, and the authors acknowledge this. They urge readers to follow through on the entire book, not just the section of their particular interest. The organization of the book and integration of the material actually makes that warning unnecessary, as the authors build their overview of ATIS in a logical, understandable progression.

The book's nine chapters are well organized. After introducing the book and its objectives, McQueen, Schuman, and Chen define Advanced Traveler Information Systems, discuss the many elements of these systems, and then touch on the many technologies and their uses in ATIS applications. The discussion on technology is at a basic level. But within the context of what the authors are trying to accomplish with this book, that discussion provides the necessary background for understanding the ATIS business issues that are addressed later. Those primarily interested in technology would be better served turning to other sources.

Advanced Traveler Information Systems as defined in the book is the use of information and communication technologies to deliver information to travelers using different modes of travel. In many locations the primary information delivery systems are currently roadside signs and radio traffic reports. The authors discuss a much wider array of integrated possibilities, but even before addressing distribution channels, they discuss in understandable detail the very important step of creating the support to integrate the various flows of information into usable traveler information. Among the distribution channels they enumerate are the web, information kiosks, in-vehicle information systems, and information flowing to cell phones and other wireless devices. The authors correctly observe that one of the challenges in developing these concepts is that technology is moving so fast.

Nearly two-thirds of the book is spent grappling with the issue of how these systems are actually going to be funded and

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launched. It is this area that is the real strength of this book. The authors discuss in some detail the considerations in planning an ATIS system whether done by public sector entities, such as Departments of Transportation or local/regional transportation authorities, or with private sector involvement. McQueen, Schumann, and Chen discuss at length a range of private-public partnerships, or solely private business models for ATIS. The partnership possibilities in a "for profit" ATIS installation rely heavily on advertising or the sale of bundled information services where traveler information is one component. Not everybody will agree with the viability of some of the business models presented which require the public to pay for ATIS information, but generating discussion and thought is one of the strengths of this book.

As a textbook, the authors follow the old teachers' adage that goes something like "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell it to them. Then tell them what it is you just told them." Even though it follows the textbook format, the book is a fairly easy read and does a good job of getting the information and concepts across, even to someone who has not had a great deal of exposure to ATIS systems and issues.

If there is a criticism of this book, it is the very limited discussion of the possibilities of ATIS as it relates to transit and nonauto intercity transportation. McQueen, Schuman, and Chen briefly mention delivery of fare and schedule information for public transportation as part of the mix of ATIS possibilities, but most of the detailed discussion seems to center on delivering highway traffic information.

Among the many applications related to public transportation which deserve more discussion is the delivery of real-time status information to those waiting for bus and rail vehicles. Some systems, such as the Washington (DC) Metropolitan AreaTransportation Authority (WMATA), are now providing dynamic information signage on station platforms with information on the next train, when it will arrive, and how many cars it has so customers know how far to spread out along the platform. The authors mention this type of information in a transit context, but it also has applicability for intercity transportation. Customers waiting for an intercity bus or Amtrak train in remote parts of the country, especially at unstaffed stations, do not have access to updated delay information. Indeed, private carriers on a nationwide basis could prove to be good partners in these systems if they could provide this type of information.

The other public transportation application that is not discussed is the offering of useful intermodal travel information. When travelers wish to use public transportation as an alternative, existing information sources often fall silent on the potential to make trips using multiple modes, carriers, or transit authorities. So often travelers believe there is only one option—the highway.

The foregoing considerations, reflecting in part my personal bias and experience in the public passenger transportation arena, do not, however, override my overall conclusion. "Advanced Traveler Information Systems" is a good introduction to the topic and provides food for thought to those who have not focused on the information element of delivering passenger transportation services.

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