

On-board broadband in trains: proof-of-concept phase and new business models





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Abstract <p>This report presents the background of technical experimentation with broadband installation on trains and new business models arising due to broadband installation. In addition to the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Department of Mathematical Information Technology at the University of Jyväskylä, the participants of the study included a number of IT companies and VR (Finnish Railways).</p> <p>There are two different versions of the final report: public and internal. The public version focuses on general presentation of the technical experiment and generic examination of new business models. The internal version includes more precise discussion on the actual results of the technical experiment, some of which have been completely excluded from the public report.</p> <p>Experiences in broadbanding trains in Sweden are also described in the report.</p>			
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ON-BOARD BROADBAND IN TRAINS: PROOF-OF-CONCEPT PHASE AND NEW BUSINESS MODELS

PART 1 – PROOF-OF-CONCEPT Summary

This report presents the background for the proof-of-concept testing for on-train broadband and for new business models emerging from that. The participants of this study included, in addition to the Ministry of Transport and Communication and the Institute of Information Technology at the University of Jyväskylä, a group of IT companies and, naturally, VR (National Railway of Finland). There are two different versions of the final report: public and internal. Due to certain statutes governing publications of the Ministry of Transport and Communication, and in order to protect companies' intellectual capital, the contents of the public version have been modified to some extent. For this reason, the public version concentrates on general presentation of the proof-of-concept and contains a generic overview of the resulting new business models. The internal version is more detailed in its treatment of the proof-of-concept testing results, and some of its contents have been excluded from the public report.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 15.04.2005 – 31.08.2005 the University of Jyväskylä conducted a feasibility study on installation of broadband in trains. The study investigated, from the technical and economical viewpoints, the feasibility of introducing on-train broadband and how both the train operator as well as the passengers could utilize it. When considering this utilization aspect the investigation also tried to clarify whether it would be possible to improve the range and quality of GSM reception with the help of broadband connection. In connection with the feasibility study a questionnaire was distributed to train passengers asking their opinions about Internet connection and the related services. More details of this can be found in "On-train Broadband Feasibility Study" published by the Ministry of Transport and Communication (www.mintc.fi).

The feasibility study showed that it would make sense to use several different wireless data transmission technologies for on-train broadband implementation. This would enable the use of each technology in its optimal environment resulting in maximally cost-efficient solutions. The solution outlined would, in practice, be very challenging to implement, but IBM who participated in the feasibility study indicated having found a solution for the implementation. That solution, however, has not yet been tested for example with the Flash-OFDM and WiMAX technologies – therefore, at this stage it is still not possible to guarantee that the proposed solution would be fully reliable. The Flash-OFDM, and WiMAX technologies proposed as suitable candidates for on-train broadbanding are so new that the information related to their functioning in mobile

environments is still insufficient. Apart from being affected negatively by high train speeds, the propagation of radio signals can be affected by other factors such as electromagnetic fields in the environment. It is very difficult to predict or model the propagation of radio signals in such environments.

Due to the still existing technological uncertainties as discussed above, the feasibility study group decided to set up a proof-of-concept test in order to subject the solutions proposed in the feasibility study to practical tests. In addition to studying a connection router that would enable the use of several different technologies, the investigation also targeted the functioning of the WiMAX and Flash-OFDM technologies in moving trains.

2. Test environment

Two Pendolino trains in passenger use were selected as the test environment for the proof-of-concept testing. The idea initially was to install the broadband equipment into the business compartments of the two trains to allow measurements whenever the trains would travel between Helsinki and Tampere.

A Flash-OFDM test network with three base stations between Helsinki and Hyvinkää was designed. To test WiMAX technology, only one base station was employed, because the WiMAX version used was meant mainly for fixed locations and does not support switching between base stations. A manual implementation to achieve the desired configuration would have required excessive amount of work in relation to the scale of the test: it should be kept in mind that a version of WiMax for mobile environments that supports switching between base stations will get an approval at the turn of the year.

The idea was to test the connection router by connecting it to Flash-OFDM and WiMAX terminals using an Ethernet cable which would always select whatever technology at that particular point of time would give the best performance for data transmission.

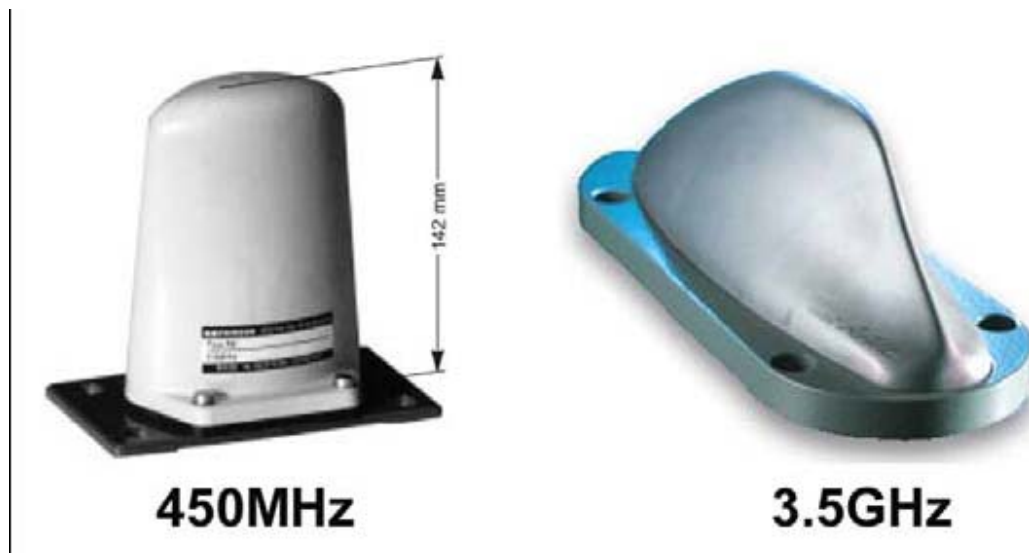
When the test plan was presented to the Technical Installations Department of the VR Engineering, it was pointed out that the use of passenger trains as testing equipment for a test of such a short duration might not be a good idea, as not only would the testing require accurate and careful installations, but might also inconvenience passengers. Thus VR made it known that as the project was to be of short duration only, a special test Pendolino could be made available for it. For the proof-of-concept testing, this was a positive development: a desired number of test runs could be set up in succession, and the equipment could be configured and re-adjusted between each test run. It made it also considerably easier to install cables and other equipment, as the testing equipment could be openly displayed and was within an easy reach of the testing group. If the regular passenger trains in public use had been used in testing, the testing equipment would have had to be carefully hidden from the passengers.

The changes related to the selection of the test train caused also some changes in antenna installations. The different types of train carriages have varying structures, and these variations were also reflected in the locations available for antenna installations. Soon the

VR's installation department noticed that it would make more sense to install the antennas and other testing equipment into the restaurant carriage rather than into business compartments. Power supply and antenna cabling, in particular, were much simpler to implement in the restaurant carriage.

When selecting antennas and related equipment for Flash-OFDM tests, the trains' old NMT antennas turned out to be useful, because they utilize the same frequency range as that used in the Flash-OFDM technology. The restaurant carriage also had this type of antenna, thus that 450 MHz antenna just needed to be connected by a cable to a Flash-OFDM terminal. For the WiMAX technology there was no suitable antenna in the train, and, in addition to a cable, a brand new antenna was needed. A multifrequency antenna specially designed for use in trains that uses the same 3.5 GHz frequency as WiMAX was selected for the purpose. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. *The antennas used in the test: an NMT antenna on the left, and a multifrequency antenna on the right.*



The length of antenna cable for the both types of equipment was 4 meters. It was desirable to minimize the length of cabling, because the longer the antenna cable used is the weaker its signal. RG214 cable that is quick and easy to install was used.

After the installation of the antennas and cables, the test group's Flash-OFDM and WiMAX sides were invited to test the functioning of the installations in the test train located in the Ilmala railway yard. The installations were found to be functioning correctly, and both of the terminals found the base station's signal. However, the signal of WiMAX was weaker than expected, and it was decided to confirm the test result by measuring the strength of the signal with an antenna that had a gain similar to that of the multifrequency antenna and that was held by hand at the train door. The signal measured at the door of the train proved to be 11 decibels stronger, which suggested that the

antenna installed on the roof might have experienced some problems. On checking the cables the connection line seemed to be in good condition, and it was surmised that the cause for the weak signal might have been somewhere in the installation environment. However, one could not be certain about that, and it was decided to conduct the first WiMAX test with the existing equipment configuration.

In addition to tests conducted with trains, tests were also conducted with a separate measurement car which had a small mast on the roof for antennas, and a power supply for terminal equipment in the interior. The tests conducted using the car proved to be even more flexible than the tests with the test train: test locations that were found to be problematic, such as the switching areas between base stations, could be efficiently tested several times in a very short space of time.

3. Test process

In total, there were two testing days during which the testing took place in the train. Between these two days there was a one and half week time lapse allocated for solving possible problems. In addition to the tests in a moving train, the functioning of the different technologies was investigated with the measuring car and in a train that was stationary.

The tests were conducted during evenings and weekends. At those times there was very little other traffic in the Helsinki-Hyvinkää railway section, and for the tests these times clear of traffic were ideal. The testing progressed at a good pace, and at no times were there any waiting periods that would have interfered with the testing. The effect of the speed could be effectively studied in the uncongested track. There was a chance to adjust the settings of the equipment at both ends of the track when reversing the train direction, after which the effect of the changed settings on the functioning of the equipment could be investigated forthwith.

4. Summary and discussion of the proof-of-concept testing

The Flash-OFDM technology positively surprised the test group, because it functioned reliably in a moving as well as in a fixed location. Even speeds of 200 km/h had very little effect on the functioning of the technology. This indicates that Flash-OFDM would suit exceedingly well for on-train broadbanding. However, when looking at the results of these tests, one should keep in mind that during the measurements there was hardly any other load on the base stations.

The WiMAX part of the testing also provided some positive results, although the current WiMAX technology for fixed locations is not ideal for mobile uses. There were no problems with the reception of the signal itself, but the reliability of its data transfer connection needs some further development. Currently this issue is being addressed by many multinational companies. Mobile WiMAX standard will strengthen the position of WiMAX technology in on-train broadbanding. This testing alone showed that the multiway propagation used in WiMAX enables signal reception without a line-of-sight between a base station and a terminal device. It is probable that the equipment designed for mobile use will benefit the

WiMAX technology also by adding to it the properties that are required of the equipment for on-train broadbanding.

The working principle of the connection router, which was used as the third testing component, is interesting. One can ignore the endless disputes about the various technologies and their comparative superiority over others, because with the help of the connection router it is always possible to determine the most suitable data transfer technology for any particular situation to maximize the cost-efficiency ratio. It is probable, that in the future similar solutions will be integrated in increasing numbers to different systems ranging from terminal devices to connection routers. It is apparent, when looking at the results of the testing, that when installing and configuring a connection router one should be prepared to face the challenges posed by new radio systems and their terminal equipment. Most often there is a solution to be found for great many of the possible problems that may occur, and in this time also a functioning end result was obtained.

On the whole, the proof-of-concept testing in the on-board broadbanding project provided a great amount of useful measuring data and information about different technologies and their functionality in a moving train. The testing mainly aimed at presenting technological capabilities. A larger scale pilot research is required for collecting wider user experiences to investigate for example the effect of the user loading on the functioning of the solutions investigated. Some of the solutions that were found technically feasible here could be tested.

PART 2 – BUSINESS MODELS

1. Contents of the study

The aim of the study modeling earning logistics and business activities was to create a base from which to estimate, keeping the commercial viewpoint in mind, those economic factors that need to be taken into account in the construction of broadband technologies, in their maintenance and in content offering.

The study produced a normal business planning simulation model (income and financial planning) and 2-3 alternative earning logistics scenarios where the following economic starting points were used as the parameters:

- investment costs for technical systems
- technical support and other maintenance related to on-board broadband
- broadband usage and user numbers
- user fees
- sponsored contents and media sales

The report of the study is in the form of a PowerPoint presentation¹ which can be used as a tool for further planning and for presenting the idea's potential for other activities.

2. A tool for earning logistics and business planning

The tool that can be used for estimating business activity and its earning logistics is in the form of Excel worksheets, in which the reports created with the help of the calculation parameters described above can be used as a base to estimate the economic dimensions of the activity. The reports on the worksheets are:

1. Summary of the business indicators
2. Income plan for the first three years.
3. Financing plan (3 years)
4. Report in the form of an income statement and a balance sheet (1st year)

There are two stages in the use of the worksheets:

1. Information about investments and operating costs is entered into "Investments and Operating costs" sheet in the workbook.
2. Other calculation parameters can be changed in the "Business activity details" sheet where the effect of these parameters can be observed in relation to income and financing.

1 The word "positioning" used in the presentation refers here to a competitive advantage that can be achieved when entering the marketplace.

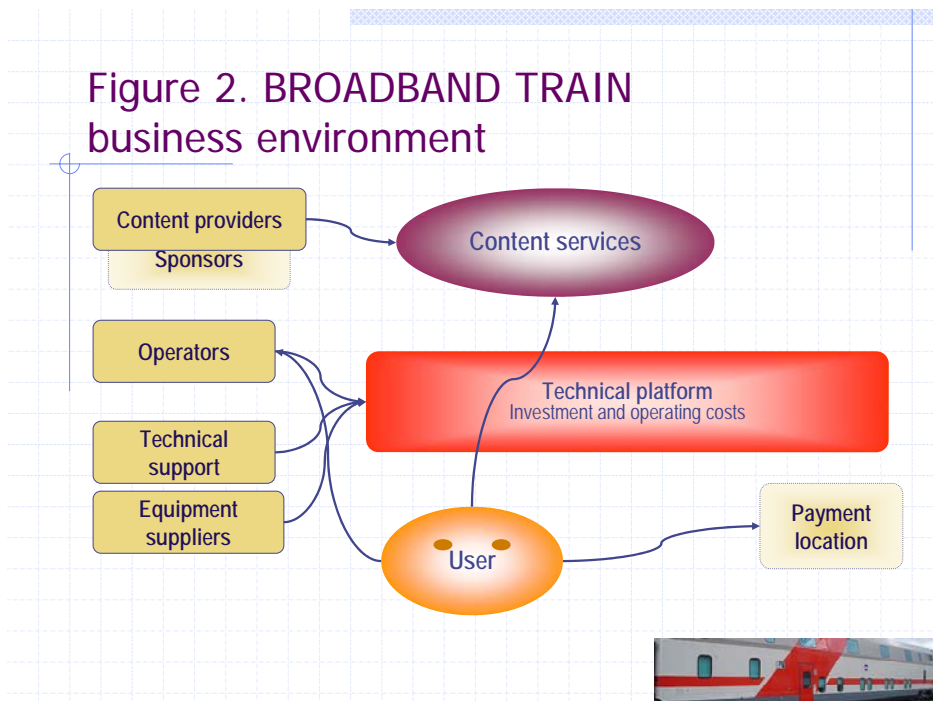


Figure 3. Contents for the project's economic model

◆ The aim is to

- estimate, keeping the commercial viewpoint in mind, those economic factors that need to be taken into account in the construction of broadband technologies, their maintenance and content offering
- create a calculation tool for later use

◆ Utilization of the results

- as a tool in the creation of the final business model
- The project will define the most pertinent concepts related to the business model and its earnings logistics. In the pilot phase, these can be pinpointed with the help of a user survey.

Figure 4. Project stages for the business plan

1. Development of the business environment
 - Technical development, investment and operating costs - also for the future
 - Content potential and costs
 - User expectations and user willingness to pay for the service
2. Aims
 - Definition of economic gain, and risk management
 - Direct and indirect earning modes
3. Methods for reaching the aims
 - Marketing and other communication
 - Concrete emphasis on sales
4. Resources
 - Technical structure and personal services
 - Time spans for the planning and consideration of activities



Figure 5. The basic starting point for the project's economic model:

- ◆ Is on-board broadband
 - an interesting and necessary service for the passengers -> with willingness to pay?
 - profitable business?
 - an additional free service for the passengers?
 - an opening for a novel business activity?
 - a useful component of a multimedia network?
 - a service for which there won't be any easy and/or economic alternative in a foreseeable future?



Figure 6. Starting points for the project calculations:

- ◆ Participants in the investment
 - Service providers and other participating entities
 - Public investment support?
 - A separate company as a starting point in the calculations, direct responsibility for costs
- ◆ Participants in the operating costs
 - Content providers (media, e-trading companies)
 - Usage fees (credit card etc. payments)
- ◆ Payment methods for the user
 - A separate payment for the service used or no payment at all
 - One-time payment / monthly fee (operator activities)
- ◆ Earning logistics for the supporting services?



Figure 7. Project viewpoint and effort invested

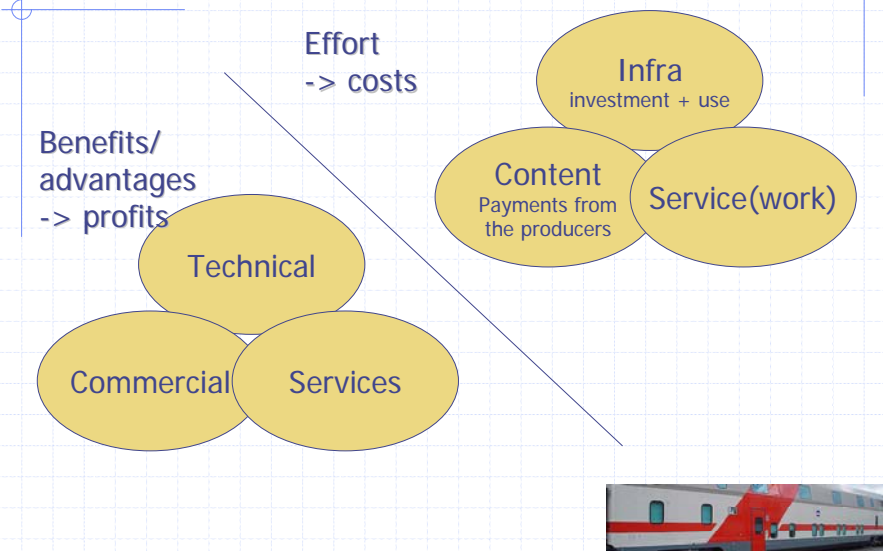


Figure 8. Project's business model

- ◆ Starting point: a one-time investment on equipment for 18 Pendolino train units
 - Information technology investment: € 579 000 in total
 - The investment and operating costs in these calculations are based on offers received by Tapio Väärämäen (JY)
- ◆ Support and maintenance as decisive factors in operating costs
 - Just one offer received: €1500 /mth/train unit -> € 354 000 per year
 - A more realistic offer would probably be 30-50% of the offer above supposing all the 18 train units were being used simultaneously
- ◆ Required level of turnover: € 500 000 (bidding related)
 - In the calculation model, finance with 5% interest (paid in 5 years), of the investments 25% expense depreciation
- ◆ Turnover from:
 - VR's internal use (€/mth/train unit)
 - passengers (€/access/train trip)
 - Content producers (€/mth/train unit)



Figure 9. Project calculations

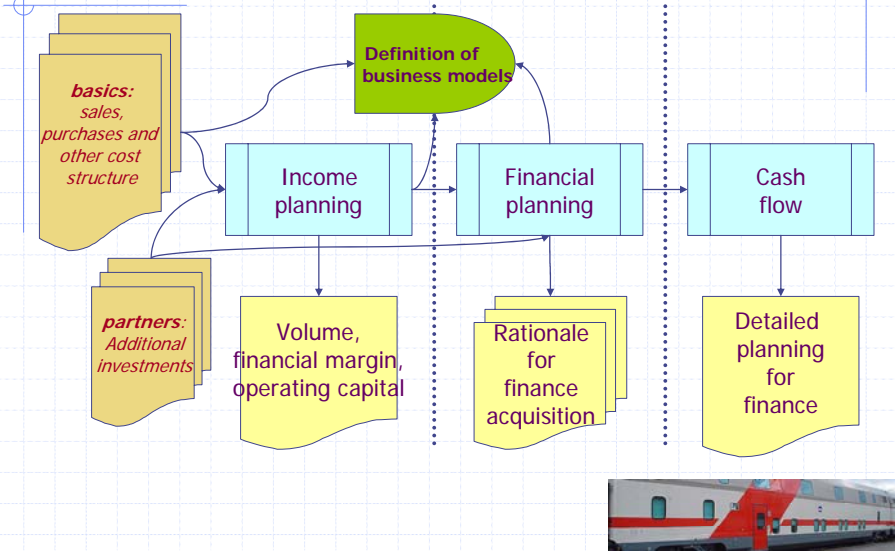


Figure 10. BROADBAND TRAIN: Technical position

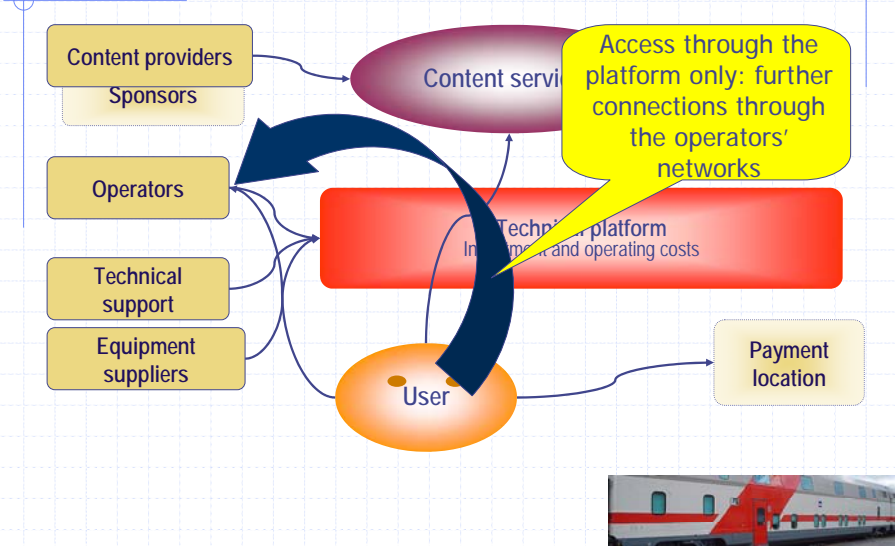
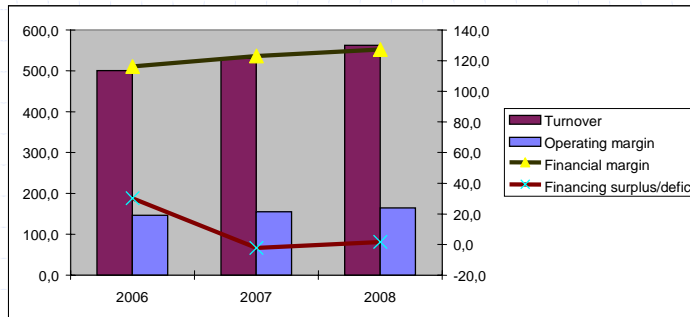


Figure 11. Technical position:
billing the user for access



VR's internal use €650 /mth/train unit
 Passenger use €8 / access
 Number of users 10 users/day (250 days/year)
 Content provider payments €0/train unit/mth



Figure 12. BROADBAND TRAIN:
Commercial position

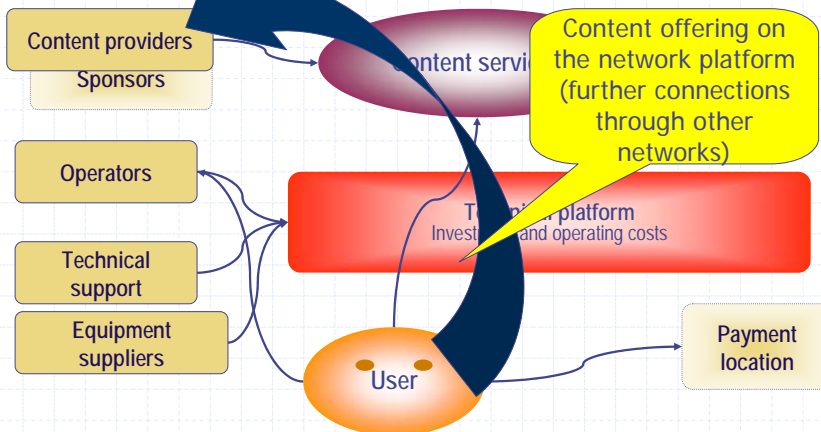
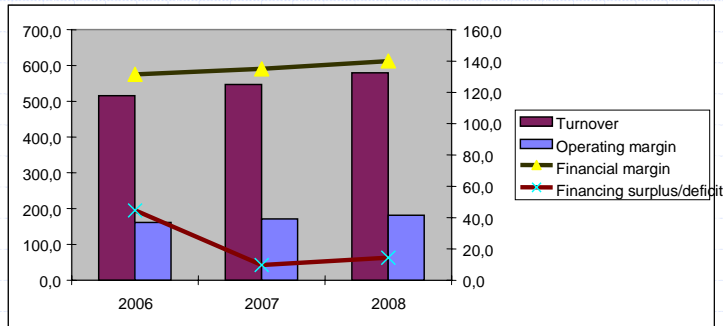


Figure 13. Technical position:
Users and content providers



VR's internal use	€ 650 /mth/train unit
Passenger use	€ 3 /yhteyks
Number of passengers	15 users/day (250 days/year)
Content provider payments	€ 800 /train unit/mth



Figure 14. Broadband train:
Service position

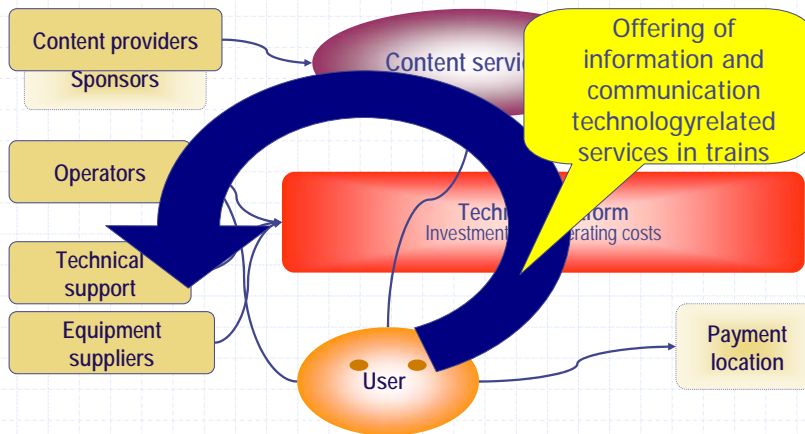


Figure 15. Conclusions about project's calculations

- ◆ User payment as a key factor in income formation
 - € 3-10 fee / user (assuming 5-15 users/train/day)
- ◆ Support and maintenance as key factors in costs
 - 2/3 of yearly operation costs
 - The costs for data transfer are minimal
- ◆ How much money is needed for marketing?
 - Should the services be initially provided free of charge to give the passengers the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the service?
 - The proportion of paying users of the passengers should be 10/train unit/workday travel
- ◆ If VR paid only for its own use component, the cost would be approximately € 2200 /train unit/mth



Figure 16. The role of networks

- ◆ Access from trains to outside networks
 1. WLAN (mainly around railway stations)
 2. WIMAX
 3. GSM-technologies (GPRS etc.)
 4. FLASH
- ◆ WLAN inside trains
- ◆ The only thing the user might perceive when networks are switched is a change in the access speed
 - Or should we offer basic/plus –service levels?



ATTACHMENT Case Sweden; Our experiences about Icomera implementation of on-train broadband 26.1.2006

Stockholm – Katrineholm - Stockholm

Our ferry bus reached the railway station a mere 10 minutes before the train departure that was scheduled for 10.25. For this reason we decided to purchase the tickets and Internet ID's after boarding the train. According to our earlier information the train had Internet access.

Immediately after boarding the train, our attention was drawn to the fact that each carriage in the train was fully occupied. Soon this state of affairs was confirmed with a public announcement. Regardless, we walked the length of the train from one end to the other, just in case some seats still remained unoccupied. Our effort proved fruitless, and we found that some people were also standing along the corridors. We badly needed to have seats, as efficient testing of Internet access would not otherwise be possible. We, therefore, decided to wait for the next available train.

On-board broadband is available only in X2000 trains, and the next such train would leave after an hour. To get the tickets in time this time, we proceeded to the ticket office forthwith. Nonetheless, the ticket seller was unable to give us the information we required as to the availability of Internet in the train. After a while, to get some clarity to the matter, he proposed to seek advice from the office behind the ticket sales point. It took almost ten minutes before he returned informing us that there had been some problems with today's train schedules, and due to this it was not possible to tell, beforehand, which trains had Internet access. The only way to find out would be to wait for the arrival of the train, and then check whether there was a wireless local network inside it. After some further inquiring, it became clear to us, that the trains that normally travel between Stockholm – Malmö and Stockholm – Gothenburg were out of service. They had been replaced by spare trains, but the train company had no information about the on-board broadband capabilities of these replacement trains. Not all X2000 trains had broadband equipment installed yet.

After the arrival of the next X2000 train in the station we immediately tested whether there would be a wireless local network within the train. An Internet connection was soon found, and its availability was also indicated by labels, attached to seats, bearing the text "Internet on-board". We traveled to Katrineholm in first class, and returned in second class. A ticket collector appeared approximately 5 minutes after the departure. He sold us our tickets, and gave a username and password for the Internet access. Visa Electron was not accepted as a payment method, even though the train was equipped with an Internet connection with the help of which it would have been possible to verify the card online as required.

Signing into the system itself proved simple. A wireless local network (SSID "SJ") was immediately found, and after connecting to it, an access controller directed the web browser to the Sign-In page. The user was asked for his username and password and the location of the place of purchase. After signing in, the Internet access became available, just as it would in any other wireless local network based on WWW sign-in.

Immediately after connecting to the network we started measuring connection properties. Apart from the data transfer rate, we measured network delay, and packet arrival. As our tools for this, we used data transfer based on FTP and HTTP and ping. There was a large variation in data transfer speeds related to location. The average transfer speed for different archives was 7.4 kBps, 13.8 kBps, and 5.2 kBps. Similarly, the network delay varied, and differing measurement results were obtained for each measurement:

Table 1. Data transfer rate. Test 1.

Measurement no.	No. of packets	No. of lost packets	Min. delay	Max. delay	Average delay
#1	414 kpl	51 kpl (12%)	180 ms	3373 ms	558 ms
#2	640 kpl	82 kpl (12%)	184 ms	3685 ms	648 ms
#3	211 kpl	31 kpl (14%)	197 ms	3164 ms	515 ms

A common feature for all these measurements was the loss of over 10 percent in packet arrival. The packet loss wasn't notable except as a delay in downloading of WWW pages. This might be partially blamed on the considerably high network delay, which made the use seem slightly "sticky". A momentary increase in the delay due to packet loss, therefore, did not greatly affect the feel of user access. Packet loss was particularly evident in locations such as rock cuttings and tunnels, but on occasions packets were also lost in areas surrounded by common forest and fields.

The use of email was smooth, and the access was suitable also for light WWW browsing. Heavier WWW sites such as those providing content in newspaper formats taxed the slow connection to such an extent that the use seemed unpleasant.

In our outward journey we did not see any other laptop users in the train. We believe, therefore, that we were the only broadband users there, which would mean that we had the entire data transfer band at our disposal.

We left the train at the city of Katrineholm, which left us about half an hour to spend before boarding a return train to the opposite direction. This time, once the train had arrived at the station, we decided to travel in second class and to test whether the Internet ID's we had bought for our outward journey would work also in our return journey. We signed on successfully, and the train's service portal informed us that there were still more than 20 000 time units (minutes, probably) of the usage time left. This allowed us to continue our connection testing also for the return journey.

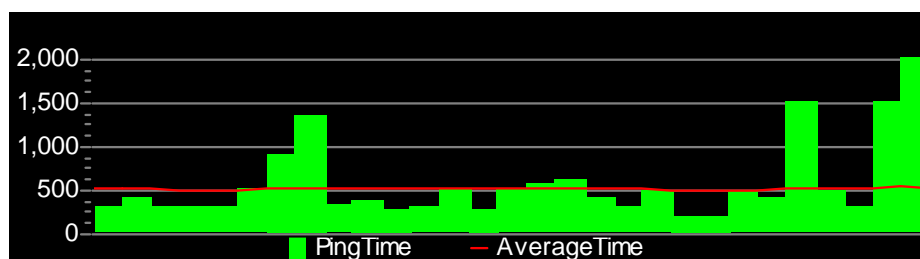
Our test method remained unchanged, but instead of several separate data transfer tests we decided to test with a single large data transfer (16.7 MB). In the beginning the data transfer rate was around 12 kBps, but gradually decreased and towards the end remained at the level of 5.5 kBps. After testing the transfer rate of this large archive, we then tested with some slightly smaller archives. To our surprise, the first of these was transferred at the speed of 20 kBps. This prompted us to try yet with another archive, and we were even more amazed when we found that the data transfer rate at times reached 70 kBps. After that, the access speed nevertheless returned to its now familiar 5 – 10 kBps level. The explanation for this high data transfer rate might be in a momentary satellite connection enabling up to 1MBps transfer speeds. Pinging was again used to measure network delay, and yielded the following results:

Table 2. Data transfer rate. Test 2.

Measurement no.	No. of packets	No. of lost packets	Min. delay	Max. delay	Average delay
#1	597 kpl	49 kpl (8%)	181 ms	3650 ms	513 ms
#2	150 kpl	18 kpl (12%)	207 ms	4129 ms	737 ms

The last of the network delay measurements was made with Visual Ping. The software created a graph of the measurement results (Figure 1), which nicely depicts the delay and its variation. For this measurement 100 test packets were sent. The graph does not show how many packets were lost during the transfer. Another shortcoming of the graph has to do with maximum delays: the scale can show the delays only up to 2000 ms, although the largest delays reached over 3500 ms.

Figure 1. Network delay measurement analysis by Visual Ping software.



On the whole, the broadband access connection implemented by Icomera impressed us. Although the connection still suffers from many shortcomings, light surfing and the use of email do not create any problems. Currently, most of the commuters would probably

be satisfied enough if trains could offer Internet access that, albeit still slow, would be reasonably reliable.

Many of the respondents who answered the questionnaire when participating in the earlier on-board broadband feasibility study indicated that Internet access reliability was their foremost concern. Icomera's broadband access could be thought as reliable in the sense that although the rate of packet loss on transfer exceeded ten percent, it did not make accessing Internet feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, network delays around 500 ms and over hampered the connection, and left the test group with an impression of a slightly "tacky" connection.