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APLICOM COMPUTER WORKSTATION IS USED IN BRITAIN'S RAIL FREIGHT 'REVOLUTION'

On-board computer workstations from Aplicom of Finland are playing a vital role in a trial aimed at revolutionising rail freight transport in the UK, and providing customers with a fast, effective and efficient service, which can reduce heavy lorry traffic on roads.

The intermodal rail system, which is undergoing trials at Hereford and to the east of Birmingham, uses trains that are as fast as the existing passenger train network (80kph) with very high inherent flexibility. Individual containers can be loaded and unloaded quickly, and the train can access sidings and branch lines close to industrial and commercial sites.

At the heart of the system is a fleet management service developed by Isotrak, which uses Aplicom's advanced G-Series computer workstations as the interface with the train and driver in each railway engine or power unit at the front and rear of every train.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), which is sponsoring the project, awarded a Government-backed prize to a private consortium made up of logistics system experts Isotrak, Exel (logistics) and Amec (rail engineering and vehicles).

The Aplicom G-series workstation, which is a component of the ICU 5000 by Isotrak, is fully programmable and handles all types of software programs, communicating and receiving data within the vehicle and to remote control stations and monitors via GSM. The system comprises a separate processor unit, a high resolution, clear colour display unit and optional input devices. The display unit is a graphical full-colour ultra bright TFT VGA resolution display monitor. The peripheral input devices include a unique backlit keyboard KM 80, which can be operated in low light conditions and is completely covered in an easy to clean, leak-proof cover, as well as a remote keypad.

The on-board computer has a powerful 32-bit processor, expandable on-board FLASH and DRAM memories as well as Compact FLASH and PCMCIA slots for memory expansion and peripherals. Windows CE offers a real Windows environment that is particularly suitable for in-vehicle applications thanks to its small footprint, low power consumption, reliability and almost instant start-up.

The overall objective of the consortium (Isotrak, Exel and Amec) is to provide a solution that delivers on efficiency and cost-effectiveness and introduces new, low cost levels into the converging road and rail freight industries. Each new train will carry the equivalent of five fully-laden lorries – offering speeds comparable with passenger trains – and these can also linked for traditional rail freighting methods.

Isotrak provides supply chain technology services. Using state-of-the-art systems and logistics expertise, Isotrak helps large-scale distribution operations improve supply chain performance throughout the organisation, driving down costs and raising efficiency and customer service levels. Isotrak's five key operations include: resource allocation, data capture, performance measurement, logistics reporting and systems integration. By linking individual vehicles to the Isotrak Network Hub via wireless communications, Isotrak delivers all the real-time information and ongoing performance analysis necessary to run a fleet to the highest logistical standards.

AMEC Rail Limited is the railway engineering subsidiary of AMEC plc. It is a multi-functional railway engineering company involved in renewal and maintenance of trackwork, signalling, all types of electrification and operational telecoms. Specialist activities include plant development, cab secure radio systems, train protection systems, signal installation and testing, high voltage cable jointing and skills training and assessment.

Exel plc is one of the world's leading force in supply chain management, covering global logistics and ground-based supply chain services.

Aplicom Oy

Aplicom Oy is the leading manufacturer of professional IT systems within vehicles in Europe. The Finnish-owned Aplicom designs and produces technologically advanced, fully programmable computer hardware for the vehicle environment, compatible with all recognised software systems, and which accommodate bespoke software packages.

Over 90 percent of Aplicom's products are exported. Aplicom's products are used by, among others, Schenker-BTL, DaimlerChrysler, many drivers' associations in Central Europe, the Norwegian Post, rural bus services and several ambulance trusts in the UK.

With Aplicom's products, companies can link vehicles into their information system. Their service improves and fleet management becomes more effective, which enhances their competitiveness in the market. A vehicle computer adds to safety and makes better following of vehicles' movements and condition possible.

Aplicom's research and development unit and the production department are located in Äänekoski, Finland. Selling and marketing functions are carried out in Helsinki, Finland.