



Even the emergency services need to concern themselves with fuel saving as the cost reduction agenda continues to bite. Steve Banner steps out with Northamptonshire Police

Blues and telematics

In an age of continued austerity, all public sector bodies have to cut expenditure. That includes the forces of law and order, and Northamptonshire Police is scoring with a new initiative that is already resulting in much lower fuel bills.

With a £20m reduction in operating expenditure required over a five-year period, following the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, it has introduced an onboard telematics-based package called Artemis to its vehicle fleet.

Artemis comes from Hull-based APD Communications, which specialises in systems for the police. By driving an LED dashboard light that glows green, amber or red as part of a police-specification DVMS (driver and vehicle management system), it reminds whoever is at the wheel to, for example, slow down or brake less harshly. Driver conduct is also continually recorded for subsequent downloading and discussion.

"So far, Artemis has been installed in 270 of our 370 vehicles and it's giving us an 18% fuel saving," states Northamptonshire Police head of transport and travel Graham Crow. "When the case for fitting it was made, subsequent to a full review of the transport department back in 2010, we predicted 9% so we're doing much better than we expected," he adds.

Other benefits include a reduction in wear and tear on vehicle components and tyres, as police drivers are prompted to drive more smoothly when not making emergency dashes. If an officer hits the button for the flashing blue lights, however, the dashboard light is automatically extinguished to avoid distraction. That said, the onboard unit continues to record all data relating to speed, brake applications, etc, for later examination, should the driver be involved in an incident. That could result in individuals being cleared of blame: a good reason for officers to support the system, says Crow.

Artemis was developed by APD in co-operation with ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers), its ITS working group and the One Box Consortium. The One Box Single Vehicle Architecture criteria set out the requirements and testing regime for an electronic infrastructure for emergency services vehicles.

Also enabling vehicles to be tracked and their whereabouts viewed on screen, Artemis will eventually be used by around 1,000 Northamptonshire officers. In operation, drivers touch their warrant cards to readers in their vehicles before setting off, so that the system can identify them. "That also means we can do away with the requirement for individuals to complete paper-based log books, which have to be checked," Crow remarks.

Allocation and maintenance

Another advantage of Artemis is that it reports on all vehicles' condition, which aids preventative maintenance. And it allows them to be allocated more easily, which in turn enables Crow and his colleagues to gauge utilisation – although they have to take into account the nature of policing. A van may be stationary for days, not because it is idle but because the occupants are keeping a suspect under observation. Nevertheless, Crow argues that it should be possible to reallocate cars, vans, etc, to locations where greater use will be made of them. It may also be possible to reduce the number of vehicles in service, thereby further cutting costs without affecting front-line policing.

Given the sensitive nature of some of the constabulary's activities and the need for security, all Artemis data goes through Northamptonshire Police's secure servers. "The system is not web-based," confirms APD sales and marketing director Andy Sowden. Artemis is also compatible with other police packages, including Civica's Tranman Fleet Management, Steria's Storm command and control, and Northgate's mapping software.

Installation of the 12V onboard units (24V versions are not available) takes about four hours at a cost of around £600–£700 per vehicle. Money well spent, contends Sowden, given the savings it can achieve.

Watch this space. Other forces may soon be using Artemis under the three-year framework agreement awarded to APD for the supply of the system to police forces in England and Wales. And note: Artemis could well work for the fire and ambulance fleets, too. **TE**