



One of the INIT ITS0-compliant card readers which NCT is using

### Smart travel

Another part of the NCT service seeing an update in the near future, is its smartcard infrastructure.

"We've got new projects starting this year involving our Easyrider smart card, which we're relaunching," Anthony said. "We're ordering new cards, setting up new accounts, tracking travel history and all that sort of thing. It will be far more sophisticated.

"We've got to migrate over about 55,000 smartcard holders from the current card to a new card, and at the same time deal with all the new university students. It'll be a busy summer.

"Although we were one of the first operators to go smart back in the late 1990s, we're still using some of the same machines. We're currently on a migration to the INIT ticket machine. INIT is responsible for our real-time system and the radio system. We also have a new green card reader from INIT which is the ITS0 compliant element of the system."

### WiFi viability

It is uncertain whether WiFi will be rolled-out across the whole NCT fleet. At the moment, the service is available on around 80 buses – about a quarter of the fleet.

"We started last September with the three university routes, since they were a market we felt would take it up," Anthony explained. "We then added it to four typical city bus routes, and two of those routes now have more WiFi sessions than the university routes.

"We're certainly seeing some very good usage. We hit the 200,000th session about eight months after WiFi launched last September. We know people want it – passengers are always asking when they're getting it – we just need to weigh up whether it is generating additional patronage or if it just becomes part of the package.

"We're currently exploring options of selling

**'I usually go out for a couple of full driving shifts a month, partly because I enjoy it and partly because I feel I need to see what's going on'**

advertising through it, which would allow us to fund an accelerated roll-out, but we're mindful of bombarding people with irritating pop-ups when they just want to browse the internet. Sometimes the advertising offsets the cost of the system and people accept it, but at the moment, for me as a general web user, there is an increasing amount of bombardment online. We just need to get the balance right – we won't go with anything too intrusive.

"We are going to wait a few months now for the system to settle in and see what the uptake is. We've also put it out on the 100 – a 15-mile trip out through countryside – which allows us to assess signal quality. So far it tends to be okay. We want to keep an eye on how well the connection goes before we say to everyone 'here's WiFi.'"

### Visiting the front lines

Anthony is allowed to enjoy his keen interest in buses as a driver as well, which does have plenty of application for his usual marketing role.

"NCT lets me go out and drive, which I love," he enthused.

"I've had the licence since 2008. NCT put me through it. I was very pleased when I went through my appraisal and Nicola said 'what would you like to do' and I said 'I'd like to learn to drive a bus.' I went through the full training programme – I spent six weeks going through the training school as a new recruit.

"I usually go out for a couple of full shifts a month, partly because I enjoy it and partly because I feel I need to see what's going on. It's

important to remember who the customers are and it's good to do the job the majority of staff do and have an appreciation for it.

"The third reason I drive is to make sure our marketing is targeted effectively. When we are doing relaunches I go out and travel the route – sometimes as a passenger, sometimes as the driver – to see who we're picking up.

"We had one example where I noticed we had quite a lot of Eastern European customers boarding the bus. We could have sent them quite a nice, glossy leaflet with a pun on it that they just wouldn't have understood. So we produced a Polish version of the leaflet. The route is now one of our star performers and has gone from a 10-minute service to a 7/8 minute service with two batches of new buses.

"We've also produced Chinese leaflets for the University of Nottingham, since it attracts huge numbers of Chinese students.

"Sometimes I come back with things that I've spotted and we feed that into the network process. I've had drivers tell me there isn't enough time to get round certain routes. I go out and see what it's like. The drivers have a lot of respect for me going out and driving.

"A recent change as a result of drivers commenting was back in March on the number 11. We've got one bus which just goes backwards and forwards at night which we were expecting to get round in 40 minutes. You could just about do it, but only if you didn't pick anybody up, so we've adjusted the timetable and it now goes round in the slightly less attractive, but reliable 45 minutes." ■