RCS finds the perfect vehicle for data

Many companies have a significant proportion of mobile or field workers. One of the keys to successful mobile working is the ability to send and receive any relevant details rapidly and reliably − so that personnel in the field can make informed decisions. One company that has refined its data collection and transmission system recently is RCS. RCS is now using a new system based around Gotive H41/H42 computers supplied by Spirit Data Capture.

RCS, the term maintenance business of Balfour Beatty plc, is based in Basingstoke and has a regional network of offices and depots. The company has a mobile workforce of over 1,500 people, and specialises in highway maintenance, street lighting maintenance, off-track rail maintenance and civil engineering projects. ▶

RCS

spirit
DATA CAPTURE LTD

One of the many jobs carried out by RCS involves cleaning gullies (drains). The company wanted to upgrade the outmoded data communication system that it had been using inside its cleaning wagons and extend the mobile data solution to other areas of its business.

Nigel Gibbons, RCS's Operational Systems Manager, says: "We were looking for a rugged device with a purpose-built cradle, so that it could be mounted inside our vehicles. We also wanted a unit that would be compact and have a reasonable screen size."

In the course of its search, RCS discovered Spirit Data Capture Limited. Spirit recommended the Gotive as the ideal solution to the company's needs. The Gotive is a versatile Wireless Enterprise Communicator – a sturdy handheld computer specifically designed for the collection and communication of information. Although it is fairly compact, it has a large half-sized VGA screen. It also has an embedded operating system and a vehicle-mounted cradle with serial communications.

RCS bought the Gotives from Spirit, and developed its own software - REDCap (Really Easy Data Capture) - specifically for the new platform. This software also integrates with the company's GPS-based Vehicle Location System, and with its back office systems. The REDCap software consists of simple 'button-press' and 'drop-down' menus tailored to each maintenance operation. The Gotives are fitted into the companies gully cleaning vehicles and are also currently being deployed in Incident Support Units (ISUs) and General Maintenance Units (GMUs).

In the case of the gully vehicles, as soon as the drivers arrive at a gully, they enter information into the Gotive

about the type and state of repair of the unit and whether a revisit is required to attend specific faults. The information is paired with Coordinates from the in-vehicle GPS system and automatically sent (using GPRS) to RCS's central database in Basingstoke.

In the case of ISUs and GMUs, data relevant to an incident or job is recorded alongside the GPS coordinates, such as materials used, defects found and labour and plant allocation. This geographically referenced data is used to provide reports and to prepare invoices for their local authority and Highways Agency customers

The implementation of the Gotives started in June 2005. Nigel Gibbons remarks: "The new system has been very well received and the drivers like the size and style of the H4I. It is a huge improvement over our previous system. The Gotive provides us with a cost-effective mobile data platform and an application that is much faster and easier to use."