

Helsinki Region Transport Authority

Delivering the Helsinki Journey Planner

Helsinki Region Transport Authority serves Finland's capital and the surrounding region. Created from a merger of city and regional traffic authorities in 2010, it plans travel services for some 1.2 million people, just under half living in the city.

The city of Helsinki had a traditional urban travel information service—a call center with access to timetable databases for the city's main modes of public transport. It was costly and sometimes slow to deliver answers, especially when people were in a rush.

The explosive growth of the Internet convinced the city it needed an online alternative that would be cheaper to operate and provide faster, more convenient and more coordinated services. It would also encourage greener choices and sustainable mobility.

Students at Helsinki's University of Technology were working on an online travel planning service, taking advantage of new technologies. CGI spotted the potential and took over the service development.

THE CHALLENGE

The initial challenges in developing the new service, now known as the Helsinki Region Multi-Modal Passenger Information System, were to provide accuracy, speed, choice and user-friendliness. The overriding aim was to create an outstanding service for citizens.

The system needed rapid access to geographic and timetable data from all forms of public transport, with the ability to juggle multiple data sets in a realistic way. It had to make sure connections weren't missed or didn't involve excessive waiting.

The back-end functionality had to be matched with a clear, simple user interface, allowing travelers to input starting points and destinations and quickly see the best options open to them, plus an indication of cost. This would require mapping software granular enough to tailor travel plans to the needs of the individual user.

"It's simple to use and provides a very reliable service. Most people want an easy life, and it definitely makes life easier."

HELSINKI REGION TRANSPORT

The Helsinki region overlooks the northern shores of the Baltic Sea—a land of forests and water, spread out across bays, peninsulas, lakes and islands. The inner city is crowded, with a high population density, but the region as a whole is thinly settled. Its contrasting geographies mean Helsinki Region has many commuters. They get to work and back by train, car, bus, metro, tram, and ferry; some walk or cycle part of the way. Route planning can be confusing with so many options.

"CGI has a dedicated department for traffic-related services. They are enthusiastic, genuinely interested in public transport and very good at developing new ideas. In Finland, commuting is a major part of people's lives, and ecological thinking is very important to many of them."

Jari Honkonen, Project Manager,
Helsinki Region Multi-Modal Passenger
Information System

Jari Honkonen, Project Manager, Helsinki Region Multi-Modal Passenger Information System

Finland is exceptionally sensitive to the vital importance of environmental sustainability in maintaining its national quality of life. Helsinki therefore wanted a robust and flexible system, capable of extensive further development, which could add new functionality over time in support of wider sustainability objectives.

Travel modes available in the region also have very varied carbon footprints. Its trains run on hydro-electric power, producing zero operational carbon emissions. Walking and cycling have the same advantages and bring additional public health benefits. So while the system was designed to empower individual choice, it was also seen, from the start, as an effective way to promote greener policies, security and cost savings.

OUR ANSWER

The evolution of Helsinki's online journey planner is a story of continual fine-tuning and innovation. CGI focused first on simplicity of use and stable functionality, drawing on our proven expertise in providing creative software development teams, advanced computer mapping and efficient manipulation of complex data.

Available in five languages, the journey planner finds the three quickest routes for a given journey and estimates how long they will take, offering the best options using any travel combination. Walking routes were included at the start to enable realistic transfer times and as a healthy, no-carbon alternative, with cycle routes subsequently added.

Each route brings up an onscreen carbon indicator showing the rough emissions equivalent of making the same journey by car. The site has a map tool to report travel issues, such as a traffic light outage or a fallen tree, and alerts the right people automatically for a quick resolution. The system is accessible by mobile phone, using real-time information to enhance its online accuracy.

WHY WORK WITH CGI?

We are highly skilled at creating solutions that integrate advanced computer mapping with other types of data, and we are experts at building end-to-end systems offering sophisticated functionality that is user friendly. We see this application as an opportunity to extend our commitment to working in a sustainable way beyond the scope of our own operations and promote constructive change more widely.

For more information, please contact us at info@cgi.com or visit www.cgi.com.

A SUCCESS STORY

- Helsinki's journey planner was an instant hit with the public. It has won prizes, including Best Service Award from *MicroPC Magazine* and the "Helsinki of My Dreams" award, from Radio Helsinki and Sanoma's *Nyt* magazine in 2008.
- It also won a customer service award from Finland's Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications and was rated the country's second most valued Internet brand.
- The service is estimated to save ten times its running cost. An independent study reported that 70 per cent of users found travelling easier with the planner and, two years later, nine-tenths rated it "good" or "very good."
- Other Finnish cities have followed suit, all using CGI technology; their services are aggregated for national inter-city travel. When Helsinki's city traffic authority merged with its regional partner, the program was easy to recalibrate to cover two areas as one.
- Helsinki's journey planner has been a forerunner of open data. It has helped to create an active developer community and third-party applications using its interfaces and data sources. Journey planner won the Open Data award in 2011 and was rated second best public mobile service in 2012.