

Paying for travel with 'virtual' money

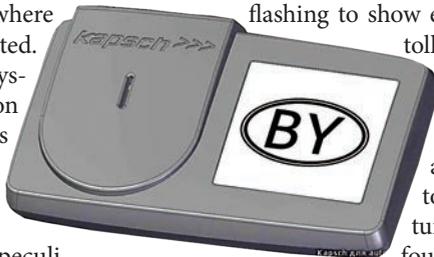
Electronic road toll system extended and joined by public transport

By Dmitry Kovalev

Since early July, more Belarusian roads have become liable for tolls, joining the M1 Brest-Minsk-Russian border highway. Sections of the M2 (from the National Airport to the Mount of Glory), M3 (from Borovlyany to Logoisk), M4 (from Privolny to Cherven), M5 (from Privolny to Maryina Gorka) and M6 (from the city exit to the M6 / M7 fork) will soon involve the paying of tolls. At some future time, the whole length of the M4 and M5 will become payable. The toll system is being made as easy as possible, to avoid delays on the road.

Beltoll origins

The current toll system of paying cashiers at gates can cause delay at busy times, although the M1 only has four places where tolls are collected. The new Beltoll system — launched on July 1st — does not use barriers, avoiding queues. However, it does have its own peculiarities which primarily tackle truck drivers and tourist coaches. Passenger cars and mini-buses registered within the Customs Union, alongside motorcycles and special vehicles, can pass free of charge through Belarus. However, trucks and tourist coaches need to register into the national toll system — either through the beltoll.by website or at special



booths which opened on June 3rd in all regional cities, and at some border checkpoints. From early July, booths also opened at fuelling stations along payable roads. Payments can be made in Belarusian or Russian Roubles or Dollars or with a fuel card (like a bank card, it can be used to pay for fuel and related goods at fuelling stations worldwide).

Signal on windscreen

After signing for his toll unit and leaving a deposit, each driver receives his on-board device, adjusted to designate a passenger car or truck: 4 Eurocents per kilometre of toll road for cars, 8 for those driving two-axle trucks or buses, 10 for vehicles using three axles and 12 for trucks with four or more axles.

The device is installed under the vehicle's windscreen, inside a box, flashing to show each section of toll road driven. Lengths of sections vary between 800m and 40km, due to infrastructure; frames are found more often where interchanges and intersections appear. When ready, drivers can return their device to receive their deposit.

Electronic bus payment

Bus passengers are also enjoying a new system of ticket sales, such systems are being developed for the railways and urban trans-



BelToll to function in the test mode so far

port. Meanwhile, if railway workers haven't progressed further than intentions and electronic registration and ticket sales (as this sharply increases tariffs for transportations), communal workers from the Transport and Communications Ministry are working

much more actively and electronic toll system should become operational even before the 2014 IIHF World Championship kicks off. Its pilot variant will have been tested in Baranovichi till the end of this year.

On entering a bus, passengers

swipe their prepaid plastic card to signal their journey starting and scan again on leaving, to show the length of their trip (if you forget to swipe, payment is withdrawn for the maximum journey possible). Drivers can only issue cash receipts and accept payments for 'whole' journeys.

The price of cards varies to reflect their term of validity: from one day to one year. The significant deposit means that it's only viable to purchase cards if you plan to use them for longer periods of time. These can then be topped up via ATMs countrywide. Those entitled to free travel will receive their own special cards and single-use paper tickets will remain for mid-length journeys.

Inspectors will patrol the bus network to check that passengers have cards and have swiped them. Alongside GPS-navigation and electronic information boards at bus stops, this should significantly increase efficiency, ensuring the regularity of transport and comfort. Passenger volumes will become apparent, allowing reorganisation as necessary. Even those travelling just one or two stops will benefit.

Minsk's metro is also testing its own electronic payment system; a bright red box is being installed next to the ticket barrier at Akademiya Nauk (Academy of Sciences) station, allowing instant payment via SMS-message this summer.

Ticket evaders

Inspection officers will be using 16 vehicles initially to check that road users are complying with the new system. Anyone failing to display an on-board device in correct operational order for the type of vehicle will be penalised. Devices are also non-transferable, with fines relating to the cost of a maximum journey across Belarus: 815km. Someone driving a bus with three axles would have to pay 81.5 Euros but fines may reach up to 1,000 Euros. On the spot fines will be requested when drivers re-enter the country, with no period of limitation.

Tolls can be avoided if particular sections of road are bypassed but, of course, this will take drivers away from the speediest routes. As most people agree: time is money.

Rescuers definitely come to the aid

Mobile operator MTS opens additional short number for use in calling Emergency Situations Ministry

The call number 112 is available to the company's subscribers, as well as to those whose roaming

services are included in the MTS network. Rescuers can be called from any part of the Republic of Belarus and the MTS network will send the call to the nearest regional department, by pinpointing the caller's location.

Other emergency call numbers are 101, 102, 103 and 104 and all can be used regardless of being in credit. "The short call number 112 is used for emergency calls in European countries and in Russia and has now become available to Bela-

rusians. Importantly, foreign visitors can access the number, which is useful in light of Minsk hosting the Ice Hockey World Championship in 2014," notes Vitaly Novitsky, the Press Secretary of the Emergency Ministry of Belarus.

New recruits already ready to serve

By Lyudmila Gladkaya

About 7,000 new recruits to the Armed Forces recently swore an oath to serve their country, with the most large-scale events hosted by Brest Fortress' Ceremonial Square, Grodno and Slonim. Meanwhile, at the

72nd joint training centre for ensigns and young specialists' parade ground, about 1,500 young soldiers pronounced their oath.

Having completed their initial training, the recruits have already transformed, as Yanina Kazyuchits, from Minsk, commented on her

son. Attending the ceremony and touring the barracks, she noted, "My son Roman will serve as a signalman. Not a month has passed since his conscription, yet I hardly recognise him." Families were encouraged to view uniforms and technical equipment, as well as sampling mili-

tary kasha. Yanina admits, "He's become stronger and straightened his shoulders. The army is an excellent school for men."

The Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Yuri Zhadobin, congratulated the young soldiers on their membership of the Belarusian Armed Forces.

IT sphere among best for employment

High-tech specialists are the most highly paid workers nationwide

According to the National Statistical Committee of Belarus, last month, those employed in the IT sphere earned the biggest salaries: averaging Br11.5m (approx. \$1,300). The production of coke, oil products and nuclear materials is also among the most highly-paid spheres, with air transport, architecture and engineering services close behind (averaging \$1,000 as their monthly salary). Those working in the social sphere are earning the

least: about Br3m (\$350). Those in cinema and film production and education, as well as the repair of household goods and personal appliances, take home similar sums.

Real salaries have risen in all spheres except for IT, since May 2012, with maximum growth (34 percent) registered in architecture and engineering. IT salaries have actually fallen by 3 percent in real terms. The average monthly salary countrywide in May stood at almost Br5m (\$575) — up almost 17 percent on last May.