Dutch boffins work on open sauce smart card

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By Sylvie Barak

Clever clogs

DUTCH BOFFINS at Radboud University in Nijmegen are developing new privacy-protecting smart cards for public transport, using good old open sauce.

The cards, which should tip up sometime around 2010, are being developed using cryptographic techniques, which means passengers will be able to buy personalised cards which don't track or keep tabs on their movements, thereby protecting their privacy.

A Dutch charity called the NLnet foundation recently donated money to the researchers at Radboud University, headed by Prof Bart Jacobs and Dr Wouter Teepe of the Digital Security Group, to help them continue with their development of the cards. The charity is giving the grant in order to ensure that the privacy of the passengers remains the researchers' chief concern, despite the cards being manufactured as a commercial product.

Strategy director at NLnet foundation, Michiel Leenaars, noted how important it was that the cards be developed using an open sauce platform. "By putting the development in an open context and embedding privacy in the design phase - and not as an afterthought - we hope to lay the foundations for a next-generation smart card for public transport in the Netherlands and beyond that works and really is worth the full confidence of consumers," he noted.

All the software used in developing the smartcard v2.0, as its being called, will apparently be open sauce, so anyone can feel free to take a peek at the code and see if it all works properly.

Transparency is a wonderful thing, more countries might like to try it. µ

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