

Tolling's international DIMENSION

We talk to Emanuela Stocchi, the first overseas-based female president of IBTTA and well placed to view tolling on both sides of the Atlantic.

As incoming president of the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA), Emanuela Stocchi aims to bolster the 'international, mobility and connections' elements of the US-based tolling organisation. And she is extremely well-placed to achieve her aim as, in addition to her new position, Stocchi remains responsible for international affairs at the Italian tolling association Aiscat, as well as maintaining close ties to Asecap, the European tolling association. As such, she forms a bridge between the US and European tolling sectors.

Furthermore, in seeking to expand international cooperation, Stocchi is playing to her strengths in that she has a degree in Political Sciences. Having graduated, Stocchi had a brief stint at the EU before joining the (then) new Asecap HQ in Brussels, dealing with communications and legislative policy. That was where the contacts with IBTTA started; then, in 2006, having spent eight years in Brussels, she decided to return to her native Italy to take up her current position in charge of international affairs at Aiscat. Throughout that time, she maintained contacts with IBTTA and was invited to join its board as a member and four years later became international vice president – a move which has ultimately culminated in her year as its overall president.

Given her background, the obvious question is what can the European and American tolling sectors learn from each other?

Stocchi is very clear on that point and she starts by stating, "in IBTTA everyone can learn from one another, it is not a question of being Europeans or Americans - IBTTA is an international organisation. And one of the most important added values of being part of IBTTA - and I have directly experienced this feeling - is to connect people and ideas and to exchange views and best practices within the worldwide tolling industry." With that in mind, she adds: "It is true that in Europe we have a very consolidated, traditional and widely used model of concessions for toll roads which dates back to the 1920s, whereas in the US, concessions are not as popular. This is probably because the American government and politicians are not as familiar with the potential of the concession."

Going the other way, she says: "In the US they have a great deal of experience with high-occupancy vehicle [HOV] and managed lanes and the European tolling sector is very interested in learning about how to deal with these road configurations. In Europe, we are starting to talk about this type of operation but so far we have no live examples although there may be some tests underway in a few countries.

"In the US, these express or managed lanes are primarily being used for traffic management and not as a revenue generator," she adds.

Stocchi is also keen to point out common cause between the associations such as overcoming the technical, legislative and business difficulties to provide tolling system interoperability. "We have lots of similar challenges. In Europe we have the European electronic tolling service project – or EETS – introduced by the European Commission with the goal of having interoperability across all EU member states. But this was not possible because there was not yet a business case and so we chose a regional European electronic tolling service or REETS. In the US they have exactly the same situation: at a high level there is the desire for nationwide interoperability but so far there is



ABOVE: Emanuela Stocchi.



LEFT: Brussels provided experience of the European Parliament and a job at Asecap. BELOW LEFT: Stocchi's continuing relationship with Asecap will aid transatlantic cooperation.



→ only regional interoperability.

“Both Asecap and IBTTA are trying to coordinate efforts to further advance interoperability.”

This situation may become yet more complicated, and possibly more urgent, if motor manufacturers start incorporating multi-use RFID tags into the vehicle. “There is already dialogue between the authorities and the vehicle manufacturers about this issue. Asecap has also been approached by vehicle manufacturers to discuss these matters and while I don’t see a short term solution, we have to be ready to cooperate to find the best solution for everybody. The European Commission’s Cooperative Intelligent Transport Systems (C-ITS) initiative involves all transportation stakeholders, so there are already platforms where these matters can be discussed.

“The main priority for tolling companies is to serve the drivers. There is always an alternative route drivers can take,” says Stocchi, asserting that “choosing a tolled facility provides greater safety, more comfort, avoids congestion along with shorter and reliable journey times. You can have all types of equipment and monitoring but unless you provide a service for which drivers are prepared to pay, then you will not have a successful business.”

Both IBTTA and Asecap are considering how best to deal with connected and autonomous vehicles; what they will mean for the technical (and perhaps physical) infrastructure of tolled roads. “Our members already have installed instrumentation to detect poor weather conditions – fog or ice and snow – and signs to warn drivers but will they need to adapt the network to be able to inform connected and autonomous vehicles? This is just an example and it is already a difficult question to solve.

“However, toll road operators will be ready and prepared when these vehicles start to appear. What they need to know is what type of information can be transmitted, and how.

“Both associations are examining these questions and contemplating studies and pilot projects to provide the data for forecasts and to make provisions for what may happen in the future. That will help ensure our members’ businesses will continue to develop.”

There is greater disparity when it comes to all-electronic or open road tolling with the US taking a clear lead. Stocchi says all-electronic tolling is starting to happen in Europe but it takes time, especially where infrastructure changes are involved such as the removal of toll booths and installing gantries. There will be

added problems; for instance, popular routes to holiday destinations which attract large numbers of foreign tourists who will not be registered users of the road.

Tolling companies, especially those employing all-electronic tolling, are also ideally placed to help authorities implement congestion or low emission zones or even road user charging schemes. Is Asecap or the IBTTA (or their members) participating in this type of initiative? “These issues are raised in our meetings and conferences but there are not, to my knowledge, any current projects underway”.

With tolled roads and managed lanes offering paying drivers a faster and more convenient alternative, the question arises as to whether toll roads are socially divisive, penalising those unable or unwilling to pay. About this issue Stocchi is very clear: “It is not for toll operators to set social norms; that is a political issue decided by national or local government. Toll roads are either operated by these public bodies or are licensed by the public authority through a concession contract. So that decision has already been taken long before any tolling entity becomes involved.

“Once an authority has decided a road will be tolled, then it is the toll company’s duty and obligation to provide the best service possible for the road user and to do so in an efficient and transparent manner,” Stocchi says.

“Evidence shows that the users of toll roads are not defined by any particular social class and because there are usually free-use alternatives - although these alternatives may not be as convenient - each driver has the choice to use the toll road or not. It is our business to serve drivers who do decide to pay the toll and to get them from A to B efficiently,” she says and adds “Tolling is one of the most effective tools to finance, build, maintain, and improve road infrastructure for the benefit of road users and citizens. I would like to highlight once more that users are free to choose and they can immediately see the benefits they receive for the fees they pay on the road infrastructure they use, as it has been also highlighted in the ASECAP-IBTTA Joint Declaration on Tolling a few years ago.”

What are her goals for leading IBTTA this year?

“I would like to reinforce the international perspectives and objectives of IBTTA which I think will help both IBTTA and the tolling sector worldwide. This cannot be achieved in one year. Fortunately, the IBTTA’s constitution is that you become 2nd vice president and then vice president before your year as president, so that by the time you become president you have a very good understanding of how the association and its members operate.

“Another benefit of this collegial way of operating is that you are building on the achievements of the previous presidents and paving the way for the next. So this work started before I took over as president and will continue after I finish my term and become immediate past president. I will then join the Council of Past Presidents and continue my work - everybody has a role.”

A good mantra for any organisation, one with which Stocchi can so readily associate. **ITS**

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