PRESS RELEASE

Watch Out Google!

New EU Project Set to Unleash SME Use of Geospatial Data

Antwerp, 14 February 2014 – Partners from six European Countries - Belgium, France, Greece, Latvia, Czech Republic and the United Kingdom – gathered in Antwerp this week to officially launch Open Transport Net (**OTN**) – a new European Commission funded project that aims to challenge the monopoly that large commercial vendors such as Google currently enjoy over geographic or geospatial data (GI).[i]

The increasing availability of open Geographic Information (GI) data presents a strong opportunity for European Private and Public stakeholders, especially SMEs, to extract extra value from OD due to the fact that a vast amount of information has direct or indirect spatial references that open up exiting new ways of interpreting it. At present, however, the true innovative potential of GI data in Europe is hindered by the fact that access to GI data remains limited in many European countries. SMES, for instance, are one of the strongest potential sources of GI Data innovation and yet often lack the time and resources to collect their own GI data let alone find this data amidst the massive variety of existing sources. These limitations mean many of the applications currently developed by non-GI experts are predominantly based on relatively easy Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and accessible data sources from large private technology providers such as Google. As a result, Europe is confronted with a potential monopoly of a few large commercial vendors at the expense of its most valuable source of home grown innovation – its SMEs.[ii]

"Open Transport Net aims to address these challenges head-on," says Geert Mareels, eGovernment Manager for the Flemish Region and **OTN** Project Coordinator, "by specifically focusing on making GI Data more accessible and useable for business innovators and public sector stakeholders alike." According to Mareels, "**OTN** will help to unleash public and private sector value in the area of transport by creating collaborative virtual service hubs that aggregate, harmonise and visualise open transport-related data from a wide variety of sources to drive the rapid creation of innovative new applications and services."

OTN hubs will combine spatial (GI), dynamic data streams (sensors and monitoring of mobile objects) and non-spatial (OD) data using techniques such as RDF and data analysis based on ontology's, and derive insights from the data through visualisation tools and pattern detection algorithms. **OTN** Hubs will help to drive innovation by (a) improving the accuracy of data insights by enhancing knowledge with Volunteered Geographic Information (VGI), and (b)

deploying a sophisticated Access Control and Identity Management system (ACM) which will manage privacy controls for personal and/or sensitive data. A 'data usage' approach to structuring Hub content and services will enable visitors to the platform to be directed to the innovation tools that best suit their needs where they can then play with data mash-ups, share insights with the **OTN** community, post service needs and create new business applications - all for free. For a small subscription, users will have the opportunity to access more detailed data insights and personalized business mentoring.

OTN has chosen Transport –from logistics through to safety and environmental protection - as a focus-area because it is vital for economic growth and job creation in Europe as well as the long-term well being of European societies. From ensuring the effective delivery of goods and services through to creating safer, healthier and more pleasant living environments, transport touches upon almost every facet of 21st century living, making it an ideal target area for the creation of solutions that can be enhanced by location based services.[iii]

NOTE TO EDITORS

[i] OTN is funded CIP ICT PSP seventh call for proposals 2013: Pilot Type B as part of Theme 2: Digital Content, Open Data and Creativity Objective 2.2: Open Data Experimentation & Innovation Building on Geographic Information.

[ii] This trend undermines the laudable efforts of the EU and Members States who have invested billions of EUR to build Spatial Data Infrastructures that actually offer a larger diversity of data from different domains than Google.

[iii] The transport industry directly employs approx. 10m people and accounts for about 5% GDP. Quality of transport services has a major impact on quality of lives. Average household spends 13.2% budget on transport goods/services